SCIENCE FICTION • FANTASY STILL 50c

# FANTASTIC

OCTOBER 1969

NEW
**TED WHITE**
**SHORT NOVEL**
It Could Be Anywhere

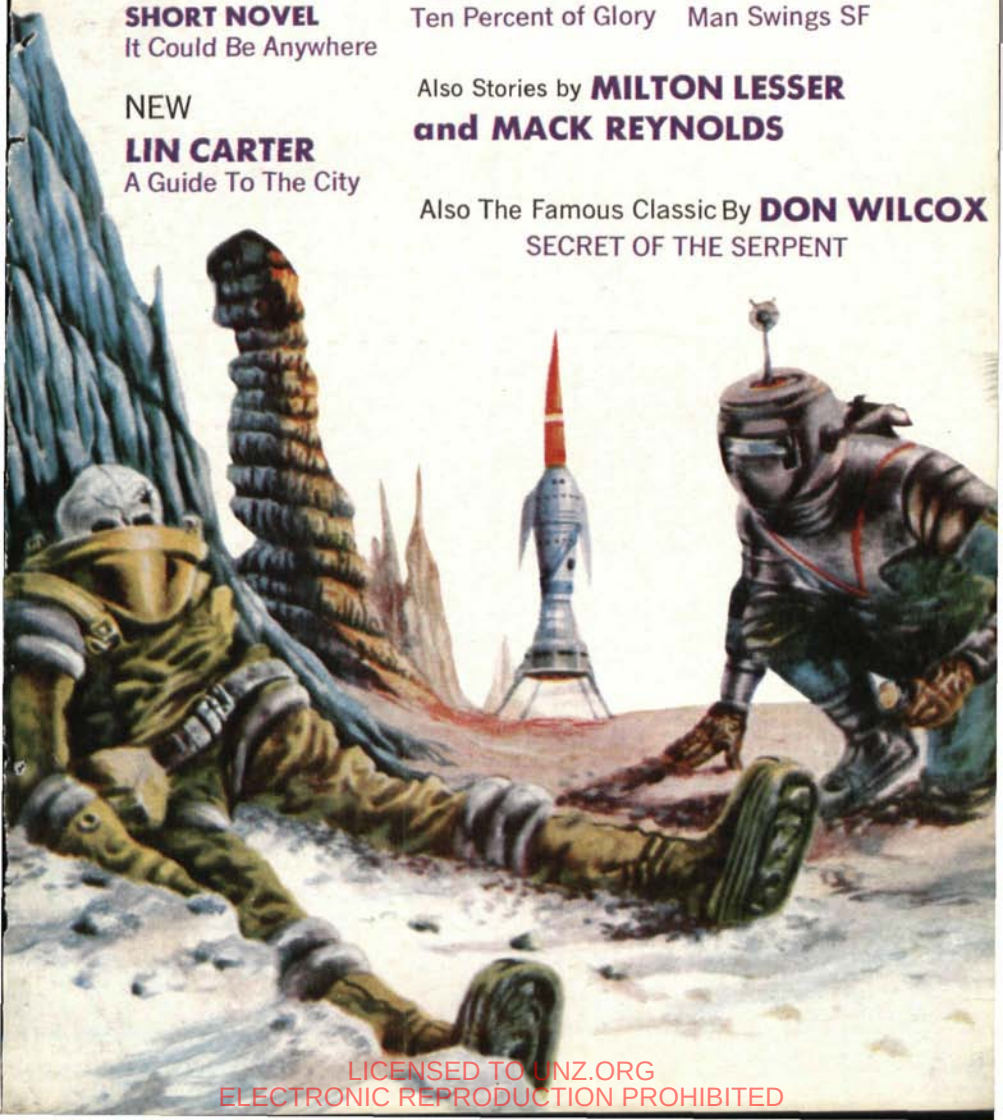
NEW
**VERGE FORAY**
Ten Percent of Glory

NEW
**RICHARD LUPOFF**
Man Swings SF

NEW
**LIN CARTER**
A Guide To The City

Also Stories by **MILTON LESSER and MACK REYNOLDS**

Also The Famous Classic By **DON WILCOX**
SECRET OF THE SERPENT



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# Cast your ballot for a successful future!

# 266 ICS COURSES

You get the widest choice from ICS—oldest, largest home study school. Check the list. (Also available, programs tailored to your special needs.) You receive individual instruction, plus success-proved facts and theory you can apply immediately. Mastery of subject is assured. No skimping. You **earn** your diploma.

Why mark time when you can mark the coupon and get a fast, sure fix on **your** best course to success.

**ACCOUNTING**
Accounting (U.S.A.)
Accounting (Canadian)
Accounting for Business Programmers
Accounting for Man'g'm't Decisions
Auditing
Business Law (U.S.A.)
Canadian Business Courses
Cost Accounting
CPA Review (U.S.A.)
General Accounting
Income Tax (U.S.A.)
Industrial Accounting
Junior Accounting
Office Accounting
Practical Accounting
Public Accounting
Small Business Accounting (U.S.A.)
Starting and Managing a Small Bookkeeping Service (U.S.A.)

**ARCHITECTURE AND BUILDING**
Architectural Drawing and Designing
Architecture
Building Contractor
Building Estimator
Building Inspector
Building Maintenance
Carpenter-Builder
Carpentry and Millwork
Fundamentals of Urban Planning
House Planning and Interior Design
Mason
Painting Contractor
Reading Arch. Blueprints
Review in Architectural Design and Practice
Review of Mechanical Systems in Buildings

**ART**
Amateur Artist
Commercial Art
Commercial Cartooning
Illustrating with Options:
—Magazine
—Advertising Layout and Illustration
Interior Decorating
Oil Painting for Pleasure
Show Card and Sign Prod.
Show Card Writing
Sign Painting & Designing
Sketching and Painting

**AUTOMOTIVE**
Automatic Trans. Spec.
Automobile Air Conditioning Specialist
Automobile Body Rebuilding & Refinishing
Automobile Engine Tune-Up
Automobile Mechanic
Automobile Technician
Diesel-Gas Motor Vehicle Engines

**BUSINESS**
Advertising
Business Administration
Business Practice (Cond.)
Canadian Business Course
Condensed Marketing
Direct Mail and Mail Order Advertising
Industrial Psychology
Inventory Control
Magazine & Newspaper Advertising
Managing a Retail Business
Managing a Small Store
Marketing Management
Marketing Research
Modern Exec. Management
Office Automation
Office Management
Production Management
Purchasing Agent
Retail & Local Advertising
Retail Bus. Management
Retail Merchandising
Retail Selling
Systems and Procedures Analysis

**BUSINESS: SALES**
Creative Salesmanship
Real Estate Salesmanship
Salesmanship
Sales Management

**BUSINESS: SUPERVISION**
Basic Supervision
Industrial Foremanship
Industrial Supervision
Management, Salesmanship and Sales
Modern Woman as a Supervisor
Personality Development
Personnel-Labor Relations (U.S.A.)
Supervision

**CHEMICAL**
Analytical Chemistry
Chemical Engineering
Chemical Laboratory Techn.
Chemical Process Equip. Design & Operation
Chemical Process Operator
Elements of Nuclear Energy
General Chemistry
Instrumental Laboratory Analysis

**CIVIL ENGINEERING**
Civil Engineering
Construction Eng'r'g Tech.
Highway Engineering Tech.
Principles of Surveying
Reading Highway Bl'pr'ts
Reading Structural Blueprints
Sanitary Engineering Tech.
Sewage Plant Operator
Structural Eng'r'g Tech.
Surveying and Mapping
Water Works Operator

**COLLEGE COURSES**
American History
Calculus Economics

**COMPUTERS**
COBOL Programming
Fortran Programming for Engineers
Programming for Digital Computers
Programming the IBM 1401 Computer
Programming the IBM System/360 Computer, Introduction

**DRAFTING**
Aircraft Drafting
Architectural Drafting
Design Drafting
Drafting Technology
Electrical Drafting
Electrical Eng'r'g Drafting
Electronic Drafting
Introductory Mech. Draft.
Mechanical Drafting
Pressure-Vessel and Tank Print Reading
Sheet Metal Layout for Air Conditioning
Structural Drafting

**ELECTRICAL**
Electrical Engineering
—Electronics Option
—Power Option
Electrical Appliance Ser.
Electrical Appliance Ser. with Equipment Training
Electrical Contractor
Electrical Engineering Tech.
Electrical Home Maint.
Electrical Home Maint. with Equipment Training

**APPROVED FOR VETERANS**
Accredited member, National Home Study Council.
Convenient payment plan.
Special rates to members U.S. Armed Forces

Electrical Instrument Tech.
Electric Motor Repairman
Industrial Electrical Tech.
Power-Line Design and Construction
Power Plant Operator
—Hydro Option
—Steam Option
Practical Electrician
Practical Electrician with Equipment Training
Practical Lineman
Reading Elec. Blueprints

**ENGINEERING (Refresher Courses for Graduate Engineers)**
Chemical Civil Electrical
Industrial Mechanical
Sanitary Structural

**ENGLISH AND WRITING**
Better Business Writing
English for Spanish (U.S.A.)
Free Lance Writing for Fun and Profit
Introductory Tech. Writing
Modern Letter Writing
Practical English
Short Story Writing

**HIGH SCHOOL**
High School Business
High School (Canadian)
High School General
High School Mathematics
High School Secretarial
High School Vocational
High School College Preparatory—Arts
High School College Prep—Engineering and Science
Preparatory Course for High School Equivalency Test

**MACHINE SHOP PRACTICE**
Grinder Operator
Industrial Metallurgy
Lathe Operator
Machine Shop Inspection
Machine Shop Practice
Metallurgical Eng'r'g Tech.
Multicraft Maintenance Mechanic
Practical Millwrighting
Reading Shop Prints
Rigging
Tool & Die Making
Tool Engineering Tech.
Welding Engineering Tech.
Welding Process

**MATHEMATICS**
Advanced Mathematics
Math and Mechanics for Engineering Technicians
Math and Physics for Engineering Technicians

**MECHANICAL**
Mechanical Engineering
Aircraft and Power Plant Mechanic
Hydraulic and Pneumatic Power
Industrial Engineering
Industrial Eng'r'g Tech.
Industrial Instrumentation
Machine Design
Quality Control
Safety Engineering Tech.
Tool Design
Vibration Analysis and Control

**PETROLEUM**
Natural Gas Production and Transmission
Oil Well Technology
Petroleum Production
Petroleum Production Engineering Technology
Petroleum Refinery Oper.

**PLASTICS**
Design of Plastic Products
Plastics Technician

**PLUMBING, HEATING AND AIR CONDITIONING**
Air Conditioning
Air Conditioning Maint.
Domestic Heating with Gas and Oil
Heating
Heating & Air Conditioning with Drawing
Industrial Air Conditioning
Pipe Fitting Plumbing
Plumbing and Heating
Plumbing & Heating Est.
Practical Plumbing
Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Servicing

**PULP AND PAPER**
Paper Machine Operator
Paper Making Pulp Making
Pulp & Paper Eng'r'g Tech.

**SECRETARIAL**
Clerk-Typist Commercial
Secretary, Engineering
Sec'y, Legal Sec'y, Medical
Secretary, Professional
Shorthand Stenographic
Typewriting

**STEAM AND DIESEL POWER**
Boiler Inspector
Industrial Building Eng'r
Power Plant Engineering
Stationary Diesel Engines
Stationary Fireman
Stationary Steam Eng'r'g

**TEXTILES**
Carding
Carding and Spinning
Dyeing and Finishing
Loom Fixing Spinning
Textile Mill Supervision
Textile Technology
Warping and Weaving

**TRAFFIC**
Motor Traffic Management
Traffic Management

**TV-RADIO-ELECTRONICS**
Color Television Principles and Servicing
Electronics Instrumentation and Servo Fundamentals
Electronics Technician
First Class Radio Telephone License
Fundamentals of Electronic Computers
General Electronics
General Electronics with Equipment Training
HI-FI Stereo and Sound System Servicing
Industrial Electronics Tech.
Numerical Control Electronics & Maint.
Practical Telephony
Principles of Semiconductor Radio & TV Servicing
Radio & TV Servicing with Equipment Training
Second Class Radio Telephone License
Sound Systems Specialist
Telephony, Electronics, and Radio Communications

ICS®
International Correspondence Schools
Division of Intext

**ICS, Scranton, Pa. 18515**
Canadian residents use this address for service from ICS Canadian, Ltd.
In Hawaii: P.O. Box 418, Honolulu.

**TAKE YOUR FIRST STEP. . . . MAIL THIS COUPON TODAY—ICS, SCRANTON, PA. 18515.** N4673J

I'm interested in a program of independent study.
Send me, without cost, your booklet on the principles of success, sample text demonstrating famous ICS method, and your catalog for _____
(Print name of course. See list.)

Miss
Mrs.
Mr. _____ Age _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Occupation _____ Employed by _____ Working Hours _____ A.M. to _____ P.M.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SCIENCE FICTION•FANTASY

# FANTASTIC

OCTOBER, 1969 Vol. 19, No. 1

TED WHITE'S GREATEST NEW SHORT NOVEL
IT COULD BE ANYWHERE..... 6

NEW SHORT STORIES
A GUIDE TO THE CITY, LIN CARTER..... 36
TEN PERCENT OF GLORY, VERGE FORAY..... 39
MAN SWINGS SF, RICHARD LUPOFF..... 45

FAMOUS SHORT NOVEL CLASSIC
SECRET OF THE SERPENT, DON WILCOX..... 56

NOVELETS
ALL FLESH IS BRASS, MILTON LESSER..... 100
ISOLATIONIST, MACK REYNOLDS..... 110
THE UNTHINKING DESTROYER, ROG PHILLIPS..... 120

NEW FEATURES
EDITORIAL, TED WHITE..... 4
FANTASY FANDOM (A Modest Manifesto), TERRY CARR.. 51
ACCORDING TO YOU..... 109
FANTASY BOOKS, FRITZ LEIBER, FRANCIS LATHROP..... 127

**SOL COHEN, Editor and Publisher**
TED WHITE, Managing Editor
LEON E. STOVER, Science Editor

HARRY LEE, Art Director
GREENE ASSOC., Advertising Manager
LILLIAN FRIEDENREICH, Subscription Manager

**FANTASTIC**, Vol. 19, No. 1, OCTOBER, 1969 is published *bi-monthly* by **ULTIMATE PUBLISHING CO., INC. 69-92 230 Street, Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y. 11364.** Editorial office: Box 7, Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y. 11364. Business office: Purchase, N.Y. Box 175, Portchester, N.Y. at 50¢ a copy. Subscription rates: One year (6 issues) United States and possessions: $2.50; Canada and Pan American Union countries: $3.00; all other countries $3.50. Change of address notices, undeliverable copies, orders for subscriptions, and other mail items are to be sent to Box 7, Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y. 11364. Second Class Postage paid at Flushing, N.Y. and at additional mailing office. Copyright 1969 by Ultimate Publishing Co., Inc. All rights reserved. Editorial contributions must be accompanied by return postage and will be handled with reasonable care; however, publisher assumes no responsibility for return or safety of art work, photographs, or manuscripts.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Secret of the Serpent, copyright 1947, The Unthinking Destroyer, copyright 1948, Isolationist, copyright 1950, All Flesh is Brass, copyright 1952 by Ziff-Davis Pub. Co.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# EDITORIAL

"Look at the *Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour,*" Terry Carr advises us in his *Fantasy Fandom* article, "A Modest Manifesto," this issue. A combination of events which occurred since he first wrote his article (in the fall of 1968) has made that passing reference take on new significance.

Of course, you will be reading this in late August or perhaps September—just as the "new season" is starting on television—and anything I may say here about the cancellation of the Smothers Brothers show will be old hat, and perhaps even dramatically outpaced by subsequent events. Therefore I should explain now that this editorial is not primarily concerned with the cancellation of a television program, but with the reactions given to that cancellation, and their implications. After all, far better programs have been cancelled before and will be again—among my own favorites this season are *The Outsider* and *N.Y.P.D.*

The irony in the entire Smothers Brothers brouhaha is that the brothers were themselves the least interesting part of their show. It has amazed me over the past three years that they have had the gall to milk a single joke—brotherly jealousy—so far past its last remaining drop of humor. They may have talent as producers—and they were certainly responsible for "discovering" and presenting fresh talent—but as musicians, the Brothers have never been much more than mediocre, and they are indeed a joke in the music business. The success story—if that is what it is—of Tom and Dick Smothers has been simply another example of the triumph of clever packaging over worthy talent. (It cannot be coincidental that one of the program's idea men, Mason Williams, represents exactly the same sort of success.)

Where the Smothers Story departs its script, however, is that success was not accepted by the brothers in the same spirit in which it was attained. Once given the leverage of their own popularity, they did not hesitate to thrust forward into the television spotlight people of much greater talent, who had thus far received much less recognition. This seems to have been their mistake. They rocked the boat.

Ostensibly, CBS cancelled the program because it was presenting "offensive" material, material a CBS censor decided would have been considered "irreverent and offensive by a large segment of our audience." This judgement was not based upon any actual sampling of the (diminishing) Smothers Brothers audience, since CBS decided to cancel the entire broadcast, unaired.

Here we are, in the midst of a science-fictional world—a world in which giant airplanes transport us across continents in a matter of hours, live color pictures and sound are broadcast into our homes from all over the globe, and man has been to the moon. Pretty exciting stuff—but, is it really? Granted, this is the


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

world sf was telling us about thirty years ago—but *which* world? Is it the gaudy world of fancy gadgets and happy delight that our grandfathers thought science would bestow mindlessly upon us —or is it rather a subtle perversion of that world, a world closer to the one Huxley wrote about and called his *Brave New World?* (Forget *1984*—the Cold War detoured off into another direction; ours is a civilian's world, for all its daily war nightmares.)

The science-happy prophets forgot the one essential ingredient in their equations: man. Like the social utopians before them, like Marx and all the rest, they overlooked the power of man—the power to corrupt, debase, dehumanize, and destroy. They forgot that science is simply a tool, and that the purpose to which that tool is turned is a *human* decision.

So we live in a science-fictional world, and it is not a better place. The world has grown smaller, via transportation and communications improvements, for instance, until we all but live in our neighbors' pockets—and our neighbors live three thousand miles away.

There is no better example of this than television.

This is a country where a group of people who live in California (or Georgia, or Maine) can tell the people of New York (or Ohio, or Florida) what they can and cannot watch on television. This is a country where, in the name of democracy, a man whose religious beliefs are rigid can succeed in telling another man to shut up, because his religious beliefs are different. The name of the game is "Offensive".

Is it offensive to you when a man tells jokes about your religion, your hobby, or your career? Well, if you can gather a few friends together to write letters, you can shut that man up. No matter that he was telling *funny* jokes—no matter if he pleased vastly more people than he offended. If you scream loudly enough, you can shut him up. You can say, "I don't want that man saying things like that in *my* home, in front of *my* children," and in all likelihood he will be stopped.

But stop a moment! Who invited this man (or the video proxy of this man) into your home? *You* did—by turning on the set.

And you could turn him off as easily.

But somehow you've never thought of that—and neither have the networks. Instead, they've hired a staff of men and women to preview their broadcasts and *pretend* they are you, to catch your objections in advance. Just think—now you don't even have to write letters! Someone in New York or Los Angeles has you in mind, and the last thing he wants is to see you offended.

In fact, he doesn't want *anyone* offended. He's going to see to it that any little joke or reference which might be considered "offensive" is censored—first!

Naturally, this presumes a standard of taste which is more uniform than any I know of. It presumes that we are all, most of us, offended by pretty much the same things.

It doesn't work. Take me, for example: I'm offended by low-intelligence pap, by machine-made plots, sanitized and homogenized jokes, and pre-recorded laugh-tracks designed to tell me—*me,* the audience!—what to laugh at. There must be a lot of other people like me, because every year the industry moans about the decrease in television viewing among the intelligent middle-class of America. Oh, tv sets are ubiquitous, you find them in every room

(Continued on page 117)



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*Here's that gross man-mountain of a seedy detective, Ronald Archer, caught in what must surely be his strangest adventure. Archer has had other unusual adventures—"Things I don't tell my friends about"—*Sideslip *(Pyramid Books, 1968) and "Wednesday, Noon"* (Fantasy & Science Fiction, *Feb., 1968), but this one all but left him with no friends at all. Where it started was on a late-night subway train, but where it ended . . .*

# IT COULD BE ANYWHERE

## TED WHITE

I

The first thing I noticed when the train stopped was the man sitting across the aisle. He fell over.

He was a short man, withered, wizened even, lank wisps of colorless hair plastered across his balding pate. He seemed to be wearing at least three separate layers of outer clothing, each a progressively larger and more ill-fitting suit. They were all stained or faded to shades of grey.

He'd been nodding before the train stopped. When I'd followed him into the subway car at Times Square, I'd caught a good whiff of his sickly sweet halo of wine. I'd noticed him, and then dismissed him, as I'd settled my own bulk onto the hard, narrow plastic seat that ran the length of my side of the car. I'd just finished putting in one of those rare, but unavoidable, eighteen-hour working days. It was somewhere between four-thirty and five in the morning, and the only thing directly on my mind was home, and about twelve hours of solid sleep.

But when the train jerked into the station, the wino fell over. He fell in a curious fashion, woodenly, as though he'd been frozen into his slumped posture. He fell on his side on the long bench seat, his feet in the air, elbows still on his knees, like a carved parody of The Thinker, toppled from its perch. He made no sound, and no effort to rise.

"Well? You going to just stand there?" the girl asked.

It was too much to hope for that I might just get off the train and go home. I shook my head and reviewed my mistakes. It had been a mistake to get up to stand at the door before the train had stopped. The girl had swung out of her seat next to the door without even seeing me, and I pitched right into her. So now, despite a few apologies from my set of stock phrases for all occasions, she was mad at me. And it had almost certainly been a mistake to

**Illustrated by MICHAEL HINGE**



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

look back and see the wino fall over, although I hadn't much idea he would, at the time. Mostly, it was a mistake to be up and awake at this hour. I should've slept it off on my office couch, even with the phone guaranteed to ring five minutes after nine in the morning.

"A big man like you—can't you help the old guy? Look at him! He's having some kind of fit," she was saying.

It had to happen at my stop. I had visions of getting tied up with transit cops and doctors, and losing a few more hours of civilized humanity from my life-span. But, on the other hand, I couldn't just push off and leave the old man. She had me dead to rights. I cursed a little under my breath, wondering where the uniformed TA cops were that were supposed to be riding the trains at night now. They're never around when you need 'em . . .

"Okay, Lady," I said. "Okay. I don't know what I can do for him, but I'll take a look at him." I yanked the red handle on the emergency cord. At least that would tie the train down at my stop.

The car was empty, but for the girl, the bum, and me. I crossed the aisle and put my hand on the old man's shoulder. Some kind of a chill moved up my spine and tightened the back of my neck. There was something *wrong* here. I shook my head, trying to push back that dull ache that comes from going too long without sleep, trying to firm up my wits.

I tugged at the man's shoulder. It was rigid, unyielding. Suddenly the cloth of the stained sleeves ripped, like they were rotten, and the smell of dry mustiness curled brownly in the air. The old man's arm came loose in my hand.

I stood there, stock still, half-bent over the body on the seat, feeling ex-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

When I read Keith Laumer's "It Could be Anything" in the January, 1963 issue of AMAZING STORIES, I was deeply impressed by it. Soon thereafter, I wrote a short novelette (9,000 words) which I titled "It Could Be Anywhere" in a deliberate bow to Laumer. When I showed the story to Avram Davidson, then the editor of *Fantasy & Science Fiction* (for whom I was then working as an assistant editor), he suggested it was incomplete as a story, but made an impressive opening for a possible novel. Fired with the enthusiasm born of Avram's judgement, I redeveloped the ideas in the story and rewrote it as a novel, *The Jewels of Elsewhen,* which was published in 1967 by Belmont Books. However, my original story idea had become lost in the process of recasting the story as a novel, and although I was pleased with the book, it remained my desire to someday rewrite that original novelette. Readers of the book may note that while the openings of both the novel and the present story are similar, the stories then diverge, and that while the book was told in the third-person, this story is narrated by another protagonist entirely. It might be added that my original novelette grew by an additional 7,000 words in the retelling and is now a short novel or novella (depending upon whom you ask). Nonetheless, publication of this story represents a full circle and a return to my original intentions in a brand new story which is still, after all this time, dedicated to *Keith Laumer.* —TW

tremely stupid. I was holding a lifeless arm in my hand. It felt wooden. The cloth at the shoulder joint had disintegrated like dry mummy wrappings.

"Hey, what're you doing?" the girl asked. "Why don't you help him up?"

I straightened and turned around, gesturing with the length of arm. "What the hell do you think?" I said.

She didn't scream; I'll give her that. I thought she would. I almost wished she had. They always do on TV. Her eyes got wide and then narrowed. They weren't unattractive; just a bit too overmadeup. "He's wearing a false arm, huh?"

I turned the arm around and examined the shoulder-joint. It was a smooth-finished wood, ball-end of a ball-and-socket. A peg stuck out. That was worth a chuckle. "Yeah," I said.

Behind me there was a heavy, solid thump.

I turned back around. The old man, unbalanced, had fallen to the floor.

He had hit head first. Now his head, cleanly separated from his neck, only a peg standing in its place, was rolling down the aisle.

This time the girl screamed. She screamed because, I remembered, she'd followed him a little nervously into the car, back in the Times Square station. Because she'd seen him shuffle in from the platform, look around with rheumy eyes, and then take a seat along the middle of the long bench seat on the side he'd entered, just as I had. Because his actions had seemed fuddled, but quite unmysterious.


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I gave her a firm slap, not hard. "Cut it," I said with as little energy as was required. "No good having hysterics."

"I want to get off this train," the girl said. "Right now."

"Sure," I said. It seemed like a good idea. But the doors were closed. Come to think on it, I hadn't seen them open at all. Outside, through the dust-streaked windows, I could see the lights of a station. The train hadn't moved. We were still in the Christopher St.-Sheridan Sq. station.

I knew the trick. Under the seats, next to each door, there's a manual switch for opening that door. I'd lost enough sleep. I yanked up the seat that was nearest me.

It came up, all right, but there was no machinery, none of the usual mess of dust-and-oil-covered plumbing you find under all the seats: no door-opening switch at all.

Instead, there were just neat folds of metal, slotted in several places, with metal tabs stuck through them, just like those cardboard toys they used to put on the back of cereal boxes. The base of the seat had three slots, marked "A", "B", and "C."

The seat top, still in my hands, had three tabs. You can guess how they were labelled.

"What's all this?" the girl asked. Her voice was sliding up the scale, nervously, like an elevator out of control. It didn't help. "What's that you're doing? Why're you doing that? What's going on around here? Let me off!"

I threw the loose seat down the car. It made a nice sound, but didn't really help much. "We have to go up to the next car," I told her, trying to get a calm, authorative tone working. "We can get out up there. All right? Let's go."

We were in the last car of the train. I seemed to recall it was pretty short, maybe only four cars. Claustrophobia was settling down on me like a mantle over my shoulders. I worked up a little adrenilin over it. I wanted to be off that train as badly as did the girl. I yanked at the sliding door at the end of the car and bumped it open with my hip. The door opposite, into the next car, was already open. The long, brightly fluorescent interior of the car had a sterile look to it.

There were five bodies in the car. Four of them were tumbled awkwardly in impossible poses. Two were on the floor. All had their knees drawn up and their backs hunched, as though seated, although only the fifth still was. He was a distinguished looking man in an expensive suit, leaning against the railing at the end of his bench seat. His hat lay on the floor in front of the closed doors. Besides him, there were three young men dressed in work clothes and a middle-aged woman, her hair loose on the floor.

They had the look of store-window dummies, but at the same time they were too individual, too uniquely human in expression and complexion. Nobody has made dummies that well yet. There was an almost comical, oddly ugly look to the way they were sprawled, locked into their sitting postures, like ten-pins knocked over by a strike.

The girl behind me gave a convulsive shudder that clacked her teeth together. I gripped her arm and hustled her through the car as quickly as I could.

The next car was easier to take. This one had no bodies in it: no one at all.

Just three cardboard cutouts, the kind they used to prop, life-sized, in theatre


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lobbies a decade or two ago. Two-dimensional representations of three middle-aged men in blue shirts and sweaters, toppled in the aisle.

"What's it all *mean?*" the girl asked. Her arm felt thin in my grip, and I found myself tightening my fingers until they ached, but she didn't seem to feel it.

I shook my head and didn't say anything, just hustling her on, up the broad aisle of the narrow car. I kicked one of the fallen cutouts out of my way, but there was no satisfaction in it.

It was a short train. The next car was the front car. There was nothing in it at all. Just a few pieces of paper that looked like name badges.

II

I was fingering one of the tags when the girl spoke.

"Well? How do we get off, smart guy? Tell me *that.*"

The name on the tag was *Wilma Demmon.* It meant nothing to me. I turned the thing over. No help.

Wooden dummies, two-dimensional cut-outs, name-tags: it was a progression of sorts—from the almost-real to the abstract. From living people, to mannikins, to pictures, to labels. Real to unreal. It was a pattern; I could see that. But it didn't tell me anything else. It didn't tell me what would come next . . .

The girl remembered that she was angry with me. It seemed reasonable to her that I was the cause of all her troubles. I was the only other living person on the train. She started to back away from me, her face flushed. "I don't know what your game is, mister," she said. Her tone was flat and hard. "But I'm not playing any more, see?" She took a good kick at one of the doors to make her point.

The doors made a hollow thud, and then tore wide open. She'd made her point.

I elbowed her aside and began kicking bigger holes until I could tear at the flimsy doors with my hands. They were made of corrugated cardboard. It was like tearing out of a big box.

"Aw, come *on,*" the girl said. "That's *it,* you know?" She sagged into a seat next to the doors. "It's a very cute bit, but I've had it. Right? Where's the hidden camera?"

I glanced out into the station. I'd never seen it before.

"There's a concealed camera, isn't there? And you set this whole bit up, *right?*" Her voice was getting hysterical again.

The station was all gleaming tiles and soft pastel tones. Light came from glowing panels flush in the flat ceiling. There were no shadows. It was easy to read the words, "MacDOUGAL St.", repeated at frequent intervals along the wall.

"So where's Allen Funt?" she asked.

"I don't think he lives here," I said. "I don't think I live here either."

III

It was a nice idea, and I liked it: somebody had spent a lot of money and rigged one of the world's most elaborate practical jokes. It would take a sadistic sense of humor, but I could almost see it on television. But not quite this much. Not a whole subway train—the 7th Avenue IRT local—and not a whole station. I crossed the platform to the wall. The tiles underfoot felt solid. I rapped on the wall, a little timidly. It was solid.

I've ridden every subway line in New York City. I know it like the TA knows


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it. I never heard of a MacDougal Street stop.

It was a nice idea: Candid Camera. It would have been nicer if the whole station had been as phony as that last cardboard car. But I didn't believe it, not for a minute. I had that sense of *wrongness,* a feeling that I was completely out of my time and place—a sort of mirror image *deja-vu*—crawling on the back of my neck. And the first time I'd felt it was when I'd touched that fallen bum.

I heard the sound of footsteps, running. It was the girl, her feet making tiny clattering noises as she ran down the long platform for the stairs at the far end. She didn't need to scream; I knew how scared she was.

But I didn't chase her. I was out of my depth. Strange things have happened to me before, things I don't tell my friends about. But not this. Nothing like this. I stared at the empty platform, and at the scuffed prints she'd left in the heavy dust. It made no sense. None at all.

I was tired, and maybe that will help explain it. I was bone weary, exhausted. The long day and the dreary duties I'd performed had already gotten me down. On days like these I'm rarely happy with myself, my fellow humans, or the state of the world. Adrenilin can carry a man just so far. Then the numbness sets in. Mental exhaustion follows physical exhaustion.

MacDougal St. was just a few blocks east of where I wanted to be. Forget the girl. Forget the train. Get out of this damned station and forget it too. Get out from under that black feeling. Go home. That was my reasoning, anyway.

The stairs led up to an empty mezzanine. The girl's tracks in the dust scurried this way and that and then led me to another flight up and the street.

I blinked. The grey light of early dawn greeted me. A new day. I looked around.

I was standing on a sidewalk and my surroundings were very clean. That was my first impression. Neatness: sharp, simple lines and very clean. Like an elaborate set of models a guy I used to know built for his model railroad. He was a fanatic. He built a whole town out of strathmore bond and white glue, with a razor blade. It looked a lot like where I was now.

At first glance, it was New York City—the same city I've lived in all my life. But the low brownstones behind me and across the street seemed to lack detail. They looked like a Hollywood set—a neat sketch that would look authentic when out of focus. The line of the curbstone was sharp and clean. Curbstones in *my* city are old and crumbled, and when they're replaced, metal curbs are backed with poured concrete. There was no trash in the gutters—nor anywhere else I could see. There were no cars parked along the street, and none in sight. That was very wrong. No sounds. No people.

Just the grey light of dawn, the foggy, almost two-dimensional trees standing, evenly spaced, along the curbs, and those perfect, unreal houses. The place had an empty, deserted feeling, and yet a sort of unused *newness,* as though it had been abandoned before it was ever used.

MacDougal is part of the coffeehouse section of the Village. These days, it's not much different from Coney Island, and it throngs with hippies, prostitutes, kids looking for a score, and tourists. All part of Fun City. MacDougal is


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lined with tourist traps and little artsy-craftsy shops. It's hard to mistake. Below Houston St. the Village peters out and the slums set in. This quiet block of tree-shaded residences didn't belong anywhere along its length.

One time I was with a fellow whose car had just been stolen. He stood on the sidewalk where he'd parked it and stared at the empty space for five minutes. He'd left his car there. It should've been there when he came back. It was not there. Something was wrong. Somebody had moved one of the set-pieces of his fixed and immutable universe, and he didn't know what to do about it. It took five minutes for the reality of the situation to sink in.

I felt like that. I'd been on the subway, headed for home and sleep, in a world I thought I knew pretty well, a city I'd grown up in. And now here I stood on a street where I did not live. I stood there and I gawked at it, and it seemed to me in the fog of my exhaustion that if I stood there long enough it would all become real to me and I'd know where I was and how to get home.

Nothing happened. The light grew lighter, but no birds sang. I heard no distant sounds of busses or cars or trucks or other city traffic. There was no rumble underfoot from the muted passage of subway trains. Nothing.

I flipped a mental coin, and turned to my left. Maybe that way was uptown, maybe downtown, maybe crosstown. MacDougal ran uptown and downtown once.

My footsteps echoed loudly in the silence. I wondered where the girl was, and then wondered if she was unreal too.

I turned left again at the corner, for no reason but that if I was now heading west, it might be in the direction of home, wherever home might be. I was trudging in a rhythmic slogging pace that I'd picked up from my stint in the army, and the sounds of my marching tread bounced back at me from the empty walls of the too-clean buildings and fed into me, reinforcing my steady cadence. My eyes were more or less unfocussed, and I was all but out on my feet.

"Oh! There you are!"

The voice cut into my sludgy mind and jerked me awake again. I stopped and looked around.

It was the girl, and she was sitting on a stoop in front of a closed market. She looked up at me with eyes streaked with mascara. Her hair hung loosely on her shoulders, only a few pins remaining to hold wisps to their former coiffure. She looked, if anything, younger and more helpless.

She was looking at me as if I might not really be quite there.

"Look, please: I have to know something. Are—are you really *real?*"

I stared down at her. I stand six-and-a-half, and I bulk it out with a weight that runs over 275. All of it isn't flab. At that moment I felt almost real. "Yeah," I said. "I'm Ronald Archer. I'm a private investigator. I'm real. How about you?"

"Robin Foster," she said. "Look, you gotta help me. Please?" Her voice was trembling on the edge of tears.

I felt infinitely tired. "Yeah," I said quietly. "How?"

"I live here," she said. She waved her hand in a vague indication of the long block. "Just east of Sixth, you know? Over a meat market?"

"Yeah?"

"I can't *find* it," she wailed, breaking at last into fresh tears.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

They always have the same effect on me: helplessness. When they scream, kick, throw fits, I can handle them. Not tears. I wind up never knowing what to do. I fished in my hip pocket for a nickel package of tissues.

Robin snuffled appreciatively into the tissue, then took another to blot her eyes. Large quantities of crumbling mascara dotted her cheeks below her eyelashes. I've always wondered why women put so much store by makeup.

When she seemed reasonably under control again, I asked, "What do you mean? How do you know you live along here?" I put a little emphasis on *here*. One block looked as unlikely as the next to me.

"It's like a nightmare," she said. Her lips were still trembling. "Like I can't wake up. This should be my street, my block. I mean, it *should* be. It's supposed to be. But it's all like a dream. The windows are blank and when you look inside it's black and empty, and nothing looks just right, and —*I can't find my house.* It's not here. *Nothing's* here. Just me . . . and you."

## IV

Like a nightmare, she'd said, and that's what it was: a waking nightmare. It reminded me of the anxiety dreams I used to have for a while after getting out of high school. I'd dream I was back in school again, but I didn't know where my classes were or how to find them. Or I'd forgotten my locker number, and, after I'd found it, its combination. Everybody's had a dream like that.

It would have been nice to have been able to wake up as easily from this one.

"You said you're a private investigator," the girl said. I was peering into the window of the ground-floor store. The sign overhead said FOOD STORE. I couldn't see anything inside but a few shadowed objects. There weren't any crowded counters, display cases, or signs advertising specials in the windows.

"Yeah," I said, half grunting.

"What's that mean—private investigator?"

"Like a detective," I said.

"Like a cop?"

I shook my head. I looked up and down the street. The sky overhead was growing lighter, a light blue-grey. "Divorce work, guard details, skip-tracing, that sort of thing," I said. I didn't feel like going into details.

"Oh," she said. I was grateful she didn't ask me about my gun (I have one, but it's been locked in my desk drawer for years—I take it out to wear on guard duty and to clean it; I haven't fired it in years) or tell me I didn't look anything like the way they do on tv (something I've been aware of for a long time).

"You've got to tell me," she said. "What am I going to do?"

I shrugged. There was a door next to the food store, and when I opened it I saw a long unlit flight of stairs leading upwards.

"I already tried it. It doesn't go anywhere. The upstairs is all one big empty room," Robin said. She started sniffling again. "You're not much help," she added.

"I'll take your word for it," I said, looking up the gloomy stairs. "But what the hell do you think *I* can do?"

"Where were you going?"

"Home," I said.

"Take me with you."

I looked down at her. Her chin came less than midway up my chest. She was waiflike, tiny and frightened like a child.


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She was wearing a simple black shift, ordinary hose, and flats. Her hair was dark, and her face almost elfin, but her mouth was too big. At least she wore no lipstick. These days it's all eyes. Her hair was cut in bangs and teased, but it looked more becoming fallen to her shoulders. She wore a single ring; no other jewelry. The ring was on her right hand; a birthstone or something. I pegged her for her late teens, perhaps early twenties. I was old enough to be her father. I wondered what she'd been doing out so late, but I didn't ask.

"Two things," I said to her. "I don't know that I should. It might not look so good. But also, I don't know where home is. I'm as lost as you are."

"What will you do, then?" she asked.

I shrugged again. "I'm pretty tired," I said. "Maybe I'll just find an empty floor and sack out on it. I might be able to figure things out better after I've had some sleep."

She winced and passed her slim hand over her face, tousling her hair. "Me too," she said. "Look—we ought to stick together. I mean, this whole thing is crazy, but you're the only other person I've seen. You're old enough to be my father, so you don't have to worry about *that*, you know."

"I suppose so," I said, liking the whole thing even less.

I crossed the street and tried the first door I came to. It was another of the new-old brownstones. The door opened into an empty shell. The building was three floors high, and so was the room. There were windows at each storey, pale oblongs that let in a diffuse light. The floor was plain and coated with dust.

One place seemed as good as another. And I was too tired to really care. The black cloud seemed to have settled down firmly over my shoulders and all I wanted was escape into sleep. "We both need sleep," I told the girl. I didn't bother adding, *Maybe it will all be back to normal when we wake up.*

I doffed my suit jacket and wadded it up to sweep clean a space on the floor. The dust made me sneeze, but I made a decent-sized space for two before I shook my jacket out and refolded it into a pillow. When I let myself down on one side of the space I'd swept, Robin sat down close beside me. It made me uncomfortable, and we didn't speak again except to say something like "How's that?" or "It's okay." It wasn't so much that we were still strangers—though we were—but that in our mutual exhaustion we had a common familiarity of sorts. It was strangely domestic.

I lay flat on my back on the hard floor, and felt the radiant warmth on my cheek from the girl's head, sharing my pillow, only inches away. She smelled nice. It was a good thought to fall asleep on.

I dreamed strange dreams. It wasn't the most comfortable bed I've ever slept in, and a man grows soft after he's lived over half his life. So I tossed and turned, flailing out every once in a while, my hand or arm brushing up against the warm body of the girl next to me, and in my sleep she was not the girl in the subway but someone else—I wasn't sure who.

I dreamed I was watching a movie. Someone was trying to explain it to me, but the words didn't make sense, and neither did the movie. Very chaotic, jumbled, full of trick editing and fast takes—too accelerated for me to handle. I felt someone was trying to make me understand something, but I couldn't make him out.


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Then came the strangest part of the dream—the part which sticks vividly in my mind even now. I was in the movie at the same time I was watching it, and I was sprawled against a wall or cliff at its bottom, lying there limp and exhausted and not caring about the hard surface under me—not really caring about much of anything. Ane then a strange alien figure, masked behind a sort of old-fashioned diving suit, was kneeling before me and reaching out to touch me, like I was some object of great wonder to him. He seemed familiar, but I couldn't see behind the mask; I couldn't see his face. He touched me, and I felt myself go brittle under his touch—like ancient parchment, crumbling under his hand. And then his eyes widened, and I saw what he saw—as though once more viewing a movie on a screen: I saw a massive spacesuit sprawled against a wall of rock, a grinning skull, impossibly ancient, perched atop the shoulders of the suit. And when the other figure reached out again, the skull fell lazily from the suit and rolled to a stop on the dry sands. It stopped in such a position that I could see very clearly, the peg at its bottom, where a neck might once have been.

## V

I woke feeling hot and stifled. It was warm and dark, and dusty. My throat burned and my mouth was dry and misused.

I didn't remember where I was right away. I started to roll over, and I moved against something that was soft and yielding. My body ached with stiffness.

It hadn't been just a dream.

High overhead the top windows looked out onto a late afternoon sky, the clouds white and yellow against patches of light blue. The lower windows showed me the facades of the buildings across the street, glowing brilliantly in the sunlight.

I sat up.

Robin opened her eyes wide at me and said, "My God, but you're big!"

I didn't say anything to that; just got to my feet and went over to the window. I wouldn't say I'm sensitive about my size; let's just say I didn't feel like discussing it right then.

Outside, the street was as empty in the afternoon sun as it had been at dawn: deserted.

Robin yawned and then came over to the window. "I haven't slept on a floor since the time I was at an all-night party." She giggled, as though she thought she should be embarrassed. "It's still there, isn't it?" she said, her tone suddenly serious.

"Where do you think we are?" I asked her.

"I don't know. I thought you were the answer-man." A little flip.

"Okay," I said, ignoring it. "Let's tally up the facts. First: it looks a little like New York City, but it isn't. Second: it's empty. It doesn't even look liveable. These buildings"—I waved my hand—"are shells, empty, for show maybe. That's about all they're good for. Third: we got here on a subway train, but . . . well, we'd better not get into that."

"It gives me the creeps," Robin said, "just remembering."

"It's not much to work on," I said. "If I could think of one good reason, I might guess we'd been gassed on the subway, and this is all hallucinations. Something like LSD, maybe."

She shook her head. "No, man. Not this."


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I sighed. "Well, then there's the Buck Rogers gimmick: Aliens from outer space snatched us and put us down here in something that's supposed to look like our native habitat."

"Really?" Robin asked, her tone serious. "Do you think that could be it? Like a zoo, sorta? And here we are—" she blushed "—a male and female of the species?"

That's the generation gap for you. Something strictly for the funny pages and she takes it seriously. "I doubt it," I said, sorry I'd mentioned it. That blush struck close to home. "I was just making a joke. It doesn't add up yet, because we don't know where we really are, or where *that* is."

"Those look like regular clouds in the sky," Robin said. "Earth-like, I mean. Of course, there are supposed to be millions of planets in the galaxy, and there must be at least *one* that looks like Earth."

"Come on, get off that," I said. "You watch too much tv." For some reason, this whole idea bothered me. I wondered why—and then remembered my dream.

"I don't even have a set," she flared back at me. "And it makes as much sense as anything else does in this crazy place."

I grunted and went to the door. We knew too little about the place. It was time for some exploring. Unless she was right, it would come to an end sooner or later, and we'd find people again. I hoped.

The afternoon sun angled down the block and brushed the scene with gold. The air smelled good, better than it ever had in the New York City I'd lived in. There was this lazy, summer-like feel. I looked around from the top of the short stoop. If you weren't being too critical, if you just looked at it without trying to figure it out, it was an almost idyllic scene. I was reminded of the Belgian Village at the 1964-65 World's Fair. I'd worked there, for Burns, as a uniformed guard. A perfectly crafted plaza of shops and buildings that fooled you into another time and place . . . unless you happened to catch sight of some of the unfinished buildings, and the workmen building the weathered stone walls out of lath and plaster.

"First things first," I said. "We gotta find out where we are."

"How?"

I pointed uptown. High above the skyline was a familiar shape: the Empire State Building. "That much is the same," I said. "It ought to have a pretty good view."

## VI

We were hiking up an avenue when Robin pointed up. "Look!" she said. "Look at that!"

In point of fact, we were on Sixth Avenue. I knew this because the street signs at each intersection said "Sixth Avenue." It had been thirty years or more since they'd changed those signs for ones that said "Avenue of the Americas" in *my* New York City, even if people still called it Sixth Avenue. It didn't look very much the same, either. Wide sidewalks flanked the empty avenue, and trees were spaced along them. Beyond the trees were the blank facades of low buildings: residences, presumably, with ground-floor store windows. The stores were marked with signs that gave only generic descriptions: MEAT MARKET, HARDWARES, SHOE REPAIR. There were no "Smith's", or "Ace" or "Coleman Brothers". And


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

when we'd checked one that said RESTAURANT, it had been as empty as all the others.

Now we were at Twenty-Eighth St., and Robin was pointing at the sky. "A blimp!" she cried. "People!"

Overhead, a massive shape was moving slowly, ponderously, through the air. It had come from the west, its sight blocked from us until it came into view over the rooftops. It was heading east and a little to the north. It was humming just barely loudly enough to be heard.

"An airship," I corrected.

It was cigar-shaped and damned big. A tiny gondola hung like a pimple under its midsection, and another jutted out chinlike from under its snout. It glinted golden and silver in the westering sunlight, and its propellers, below and behind the gondola, made little flashes. It seemed to be angled into a slight wind, and moved so slowly it was almost drifting. As we watched, the huge stabilizer vanes at its rear dipped, and its nose angled down.

"Where's it going?" Robin said, her voice tight with excitement. She clutched at my arm. "I wonder where it's going?"

"Looks like it's coming down for a landing," I said. I felt that uneasiness again, like the airship was a weight suspended over me that might fall at any moment.

The airship started to slip behind the nearby buildings on the east side of the street. Robin dashed across to the west side for a better view. I followed, more slowly.

"It's the Empire State Building!" she called. "It's landing on the Empire State Building!"

As I saw it nosing down against the observation deck on that tall spire, the thought ran chillingly through my mind: *The Empire State Building had originally been planned with a mooring mast for dirigibles.*

## VII

It wasn't the Empire State Building. The plaque on the entranceway said *United Dominion Building* in clean, precise letters which looked like they'd been cut in the bronze only hours before. But the interior lobby was substantial—far more solid and complete in appearance than the interior of any other building we'd seen.

Our footsteps echoed crisply on tile and bounced around between marble walls. The lobby was as big as the waiting room at Grand Central Station, and remarkably similar in design. Across the wide floor from the entranceway was a bank of elevators, and we made straight for them.

I heard a faint humming sound as we neared the solid brass doors, and the light over the last elevator to the left was a beacon in the gloom. "At least the elevators work," Robin said. Her voice was loud in the silence.

"*One* of them works," I said. I pushed at the *up* buttons by each closed door, and none opened. We stared with suspended anticipation at that bright little *"In Use"* light over the last door while our breaths still came heavily in our throats from the pounding run up the avenue and across sidestreets to this building.

"I hope they wait," Robin said.

"Wait? That ship was coming in to dock," I said. "They should be coming down."

"Down this elevator?"

"You see any others in use?"

"You know," she said. "All of a sudden I'm—I'm scared."


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I touched her arm. "Yeah," I said. "I know what you mean."

"Maybe we shouldn't . . . Uh, you know, maybe we should wait somewhere else," she said. "Not so close to the elevator, I mean."

I knew what she meant. But I didn't move.

The humming sound changed pitch then, and then stopped. The big brass doors, elaborate in their rococco filigree relief, made a sighing sound, and then parted.

The open elevator was a square of bright light in the unlit gloom of the tomblike lobby. It was completely empty.

Robin let out her breath like a punctured balloon. "No one came down!" she said wonderingly.

The doors seemed to hesitate, and I stepped between them, throwing a block with my left shoulder. "Come on," I said. "Get in. Let's see what's going on up there."

"Yeah," she said. "Okay." Her voice was heavy with the effects of anticlimax.

The floor of the elevator thrust up against my feet, and for a moment my knees felt weak. Reaction; that's what it had to be, just simple reaction. In mid-flight, the car seemed to pause, and my gut did a nice over-easy while my ears popped. Then the doors were sighing open again.

We stepped out into an open rotunda circled by glass walls. Beyond the glass we could see a sweeping open deck, a high parapet, and—beyond that—the city, laid out like a tabletop model and tiny in the distance. Long shafts of afternoon sunlight lay yellow and lazy across the floor, and the air was warm and still, even a little confined, like that in a closed summertime attic.

Robin tugged at me and I turned to my right and followed her across the rotunda to a door that led out onto the deck. But I followed her sluggishly and without hope. Beyond the panoramic glass windows I'd already seen the airship slowly moving away.

I pushed open the door, and the air, suddenly gusty and sharp, nipped at my skin and tugged at my baggy clothes. I went over to the wall and put my heavy hand on Robin's shoulder. She was shaking, and I could feel the vibrations in her shoulder.

"Why?" she said. The airship was still only a block or two away, and the hum of its motors filled the turbulent air around us. It was like a great beetle, hanging impossibly close in the air—so huge and looming that even a couple of blocks away it seemed almost close enough to touch, almost close enough to be reached in a single leap.

*"Why?"* she cried again, her voice tearing and breaking with the strain.

The airship's motors were on little pods, and their propellers flashed with the rays of the dying sun behind us. I thought I could see people in the gondolas—strangely costumed figures standing behind their tinted glass windows, staring back at us—and I wanted to shake my fist at them and shout imprecations and curses at them. But I didn't. Instead I put both hands on Robin's shoulders and kneeded them soothingly, working my hands over her knotted muscles and easing their tension.

"It's—" I started to say, and then I stopped, frozen, even as I felt Robin freeze under my hands, incredulous at the impossible thing that was happening.

The airship was *changing.*

It was still no more than a quarter of a mile away, but it had started to become blurred, indistinct, as though I


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

could no longer directly focus my eyes on it. Then it seemed to me that I could even see through it a little, as though it was growing transparent. But this was not to be its final change, for even as it wavered in the yellow sunlight, its form became fluid and it began to change into something longer and thinner, its tail structure shrinking, wings sprouting from its sides, and its podlike motors moving out onto the undersides of those wings. It was like watching the lapsed-time photography of a growing plant: a swift and inexorable *change* that was frighteningly certain in its fluidity.

It had only just assumed its final shape when it disappeared completely, fading like a morning mist into thin blue air.

Robin turned under my slack hands and look up at me. Her face looked terrible. "You—saw it—too?" she asked, haltingly.

"Yeah," I said. That was all I could say. "Yeah." My mind had stopped working. I turned away from her and, putting each foot carefully before the last, I retraced my steps back through the door and into the sheltered room of glass.

A broadly curving bench-seat followed the glass walls around the edge of the rotunda. I dropped to a seat just inside the door and let my eyes dwell, unfocussed, on the bank of elevators that stood in the room's center. The doors of the elevator we'd used still stood open, and its sterile-lit interior beckoned, but I could not respond.

I sensed movement at my side and when I looked, Robin was sitting there, next to me. Our eyes met.

"I don't have any answers," I said. "Okay?"

"I feel sick," she said. She was still shaking.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I know how you feel," I said, meaninglessly. I didn't know how she felt; I didn't even know how *I* felt.

You can throw just so much at the human brain before it becomes numbed. Like those experiments down in Houston with disorientation. Mess with a man's senses long enough, and he just stops evaluating the data. His mind goes numb. He still senses, he still has some sort of awareness, but he's passive, too numbed by the assault to care to respond.

What had happened to me was simply beyond anything I could accept. Beginning with that bowery bum on the subway train, everything had been getting more and more *unreal*. What do you do when a man's head falls off? At first that freezing grip on your heart, and a moment in which everything seems to be standing stark still. And then a moment of incredulity. They're putting me on! And then maybe a laugh, shaky, but still a laugh. It's some kind of joke, right?

But where does the joke stop? When does your laughter start to become hysterical? Just how much *unreality* can a man accept?

Okay, I'm on the wrong side of the generation gap, and the only drugs I'm familiar with are nicotine, caffeine, and alcohol, so while I've had my blind-drunk moments I've never had my mind blown, I've never crossed that mental threshold between reality and *un*reality. I'm not one of McLuhan's generation; I was brought up before television. I can't just reach out and turn a knob. I can't just say to myself, "Hey man, this is a bad trip, you know?" and know I'll weather it through.

I am just me: a big overgrown bulk of man; fat, but too big, too tall, to be laughed at; seedy, threads showing at my collar and my cuffs, no money in my savings account and not very much in the Special Checking; an out-of-place guy who won't work for other people because he doesn't like having a boss, but who ends up working for every two-bit jerk who needs a bad debt chased, a floozy wife checked out, or a paper served. I am my own adjustment with reality: a side-pocket on the great pool-table of life. Yeah. So why me? Why me, here, now, in this place?

"Why us?" came Robin's voice out of the air under my ear. "What's so special about us, anyway?"

I turned my head and looked at her. She was rubbing her eyes with a used tissue I'd given her. Her face looked tight with strain, which didn't surprise me at all.

"I dunno," I said. "How do you mean, 'special'?"

"Well, it must mean *something*," she said. "There must be *some* reason why all this is happening to us, and not to somebody else entirely."

"The more I think about it," I said, "the more I think it was just a random thing. Like a pinball machine. Drop your nickel in, plunk, and up pops the ball. Here we are, two chromium-plated balls bouncing around a giant machine-board, while every so often someone up there works the flippers and bats us off in new directions."

"I like the alien zoo theory better," she said.

"Yeah? Representative specimens of our race and all that?"

"I know; it sounds just as dumb, doesn't it?"

"Believe me," I said, "right now you could say anything and it would not sound any better or worse to me. I'm just talking to hear the sounds my mouth makes."


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Well, that's better than nothing," she said. And I had to agree with her. It was nice to hear the sound of your own voice—at least *that* hadn't changed.

VIII

"Tell me about yourself," I said.

"How do you mean?"

"Oh, you know: what you do, what you'd been doing before you got on that subway, stuff like that."

"Why?" she asked.

"Mostly just to pass the time of day," I said. "Maybe because you'll tell me why you're special and this happened to you."

"I'll trade," she said. "Tell me about you."

"There isn't much to tell," I said. And then I told her. It didn't take long. There really *wasn't* much to tell.

She gave me a kind of funny, wide-eyed look while I talked, and when I stopped she just kept on staring at me, like she expected more. I guess she did. I didn't sound very impressive when I'd finished.

"Oh," she said. "Oh . . ." and it was like a sigh.

"What about yourself?" I prodded.

She kind of shook herself and then said, "I guess we're two of a kind."

"How do you mean that?"

"We're both losers."

I waited.

"My bit was modelling," she said. Her voice was low, flat, a monotone devoid of expression. "You know the scene: small town girl goes to the big city, that sort of stuff . . . Small town girl, that's me.

"Straight out of highschool in North Platte, Nebraska. I conned my folks out of some money, put together my folio of photos, and hopped a plane to New York City. I thought I had it made—dumb arrogance, you know?"

I nodded. It wasn't very different from a lot of other stories I've heard. Once in a while I have to track one of these kids down for a distraught parent in Lima, Ohio or some place like that, and after a while the depressing details begin to resemble each other and you wonder if maybe somebody wrote a book once called *How to Fail in New York City,* because these kids seem to have picked it up in the same place, all of them.

"So, okay, the first seven months my folks picked up the tab on my rent, and I made the rounds of the agencies—even got a little work, you know, something I could write home about—and I thought I was sitting pretty. I really thought I had it made. Wow." She shook her head as if incredulous at her own naivete.

"Then, just when I thought things were really going to break big for me, everything goes wrong. First I get a telegram: my folks were killed in an accident on the Interstate—a freak gust of wind or something blew them into the side of one of those big double-trailer-truck things, at sixty. Wiped out—" she snapped her fingers, a trick I've never learned "—like that. Dead. No inheritance; their debts and taxes took it all. No more rent checks, either. Isn't that funny? I'm reading this telegram and I'm crying and suddenly I'm thinking, *it's almost the end of the month and the rent will be due.* And that's when it really hits me: I'm really and truly alone—on my own.

"But at least I have this new account. I'm due to become a regular in a series of tv commercials and magazine tie-ins. That was my big break, right? From that I could go on to acting and maybe


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

even stardom, right? I mean, Barbara Feldon made it. Why not me?

"So the next day they let me have it with the other barrel: the agency involved with the big campaign had decided I was not 'the right type' for them and the product. My agency was, you know, very regretful, and 'We're sure something else will turn up soon, dear' —that sort of stuff.

"Wow. I checked my bank balance, and that was a laugh. Rent on my apartment—very chic, you know, East 81st Street—was $190.00 and I didn't have anyone to share it with, and I had two cans of frozen orange juice in the fridge, and that's *it*. No money, no job, nothing.

"So I start making phone calls. But I guess I let my emotions show. That's one thing I've learned about New York: it's like as long as you're on the way up, everybody likes you. But just let it be known you're in trouble of any sort and they never heard of you. You're abandoned. Like those cars, that they leave at the curbs and people come along and strip them until they're a pile of junk. That's me: a walking invitation to vandals.

"So I did something I'd thought about but never done before. I answered one of those ads for models they run in the underground newspapers. You know the line—'No experience necessary; minimum $50 to $75 per shooting' and usually something about how a girl should be 'uninhibited,' or 'not a prude.' I called one of them, and this guy tells me to come down to his studio, it's in the East Village. What it really is, is an old loft on Great Jones Street, with part of it partitioned off with curtains into the guy's own pad. As it turned out, that's also where he did most of his shooting—around his elaborate bed.

"It made my skin crawl when I walked into the place—after climbing three flights of ratty stairs—but he was pretty decent, and he had a couple other girls there and it was all strictly business. He wanted semi-nude poses, you know—seductively draped on a bed, bare to the waist—the kind they print in men's magazines. And I thought, why not? It wasn't like my mother would ever see them. And it was a fast sixty bucks. I was nervous, but there were these other girls, walking around, you know, half undressed, and it was easy to get used to.

"So the guy pays me the money and takes down my phone number and tells me he'll call when he wants me again. But sixty bucks—that's just a third of what I needed, right?

"Well, I won't go into all the details, but I called a couple more ads, got propositioned, turned it down, couldn't raise all my rent, and finally decided something I should have thought of sooner: I had to live in a cheaper place.

"Which is how I happened to move in with a girl down on Bleecker Street. She had an ad in the *Times* and I got there first.

"By now you're getting the picture. The legit jobs are drying up fast, and all I can do—mostly because it's easy and it's quick—is the sex stuff. So one day I'm at that loft on Great Jones Street, and the guy asks me if I'd mind posing with another girl, you know, group stuff. Without any clothes. Without, uhh, hiding myself, you know. So I'm doing it and my mind is blank and it's really no different than the other stuff: it's just posing for pictures, right?"

I sighed and shook my head. Walk down any block around Times Square and you'll find dozens of little hole-in-the-wall bookstores advertising sex



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

books, nudist magazines and 'peep shows'. There's a fantastic amount of the stuff being ground out these days, what with defacto legalization of pornography and near-pornography. It takes a constant supply of new pics to feed this market, and there are a lot of good looking but hungry girls in New York City. It doesn't take much to see the connection, particularly in this pot-happy time of sexual revolution. Mark me down as a square; I'm too old to adjust without blinking at least once.

"Right," she continued. "I can see you have it all figured out. I told you we were two of a kind. We each think we're being independent, living our own lives, but what are we doing, really? Somebody else's dirty-work, right?"

"So what happened last night?" I asked. "What put you on that train at that hour?"

She sighed. "Yeah," she said. "Last night. I'd rather forget last night."

I didn't say anything. I just waited. The silence stretched out until it felt about ready to snap. Then—

"It's an easy progression, right? Sexy pictures to dirty pictures to—the real thing. If you're willing to pose for it, why not do it? Not with the stud in the studio—he's an ape, and besides he's as broke and as hungry as you are. But they can set you up with a 'date,' with, like, a man with money. Good money. Why not? Just a 'date', right? It's not like you were a—a regular whore or something, *right?* Her face twisted and tears spilled from her eyes.

But she kept right on talking, in that same dead tone, as if there had been no interruption. Spilling it out: all the pent-up self-hatred and frustration and fear and self-pity she'd been holding inside herself for—how long? Months?

"So I think it's a good looking man with money; he'll take me out to dinner and maybe a show first. It won't be so bad. I'll convince myself I like him.

"And then I meet him, and he's this creep, this utter jerk. He's big and he's almost handsome, but his face is all puffy-bland, like a, a mushroom or something—like he hadn't ever finished growing and it was unfinished. And he giggled. He giggled about everything. He made all these sly little jokes and he took me to a ratty restaurant on Forty-Sixth Street, and every time I looked at him I gagged on my food. Right away I could see why he was paying for it. This cretin would have scared off his own mother. Wow, it makes me up tight just to think about him."

"What happened?" I asked.

"What do you think? I went to bed with him. But not in his apartment or wherever he lives. Oh, no! In a cheap, crummy little hotel—it was just better than a flop house—right on the same block with the restaurant. He paid six bucks in advance for the room—no luggage. He took me up in this stifling little automatic elevator that smelled of stale urine, and as we went down the hall he's bending over and peering at the number on each door and then back at his key, like he's half-blind and has no memory either. Vain—too vain to wear glasses. He told me that, afterwards. I suppose that explains his watery blue eyes and their unfocussed-look.

"So we get to the room, we take off our clothes—no finesse to him at all, just take 'em off and jump into bed—and the bed is one of these things that sags in the middle and squeeks every time you take a deep breath, and—oh, I just don't want to think about it. It was just stinking, lousy, awful. Okay?"


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"And you were coming home," I said.

"Yeah. Coming home. He tucked some money under the pillow and left, and I just lay there for hours, curled into a little ball like I used to do when I was little and the bed was too cold in the winter, and I tried to think about the things I'd been doing and what I was doing to myself and my mind just ran on and on without ever stopping anywhere, without ever really reaching any conclusions, without making any decisions. Except that I hated myself. I really did. It seems so easy to talk about: you know, modern morality, and all that. But I guess I really knew, inside myself, what I was doing.

"I got up around four. I could have stayed the night—the room was paid for, after all—but I didn't want people to see me leaving. I knew they'd see me and know what I'd done. I felt like a little girl. Confused. All sick inside my stomach. So I sneaked out of that fleabag hotel and walked down to Times Square and into the subway station and there we are. Okay? Does that give you the scoop?"

I had to be honest. "No," I said. "It doesn't tell me why it happened, or even what happened. But I guess I understand you a little better. Okay?"

"My sordid past." She gave a bitter laugh.

I squeezed her hand. It looked frail and tiny in my own. "Partners in adversity, okay?" I looked up. The sun was sinking behind a cloudbank in the west and already the rotunda was filled with long shadows. "Let's see what there is to see out there before the sun goes down," I suggested.

"Why?"

"Why not?" I shrugged, and pulled myself up onto my feet. My muscles groaned; I may be well-upholstered, but sleeping on a bare floor has never been very satisfying.

## IX

The wind was definitely chill, now, and it whipped and tugged insistantly at us as we went to the edge of the deck and looked over. Robin Foster hugged herself and I wanted to put my arms around her, just to warm her and comfort her, but I had the feeling that she might misinterpret it. She'd just finished telling me that she was a Fallen Woman, but she didn't believe it—didn't want to believe it—and yet she'd be afraid *I* believed it. She had to be waiting for some sign from me, some indication of any change in my attitude towards her. So I had to be casual and try to make it seem that my attitude really hadn't changed. And it hadn't changed, of course—I've been around long enough to know better than to make snap judgements. I'd been sizing her up all along, and I had a pretty good handle on her by now. Her story told me why she was so bitter and self-depreciating, but I didn't think any less of her for it. Thing is, she couldn't know that—not for sure. And there was no way for me to tell her so she would know it. So things would be a little touchy for a while, and then maybe it wouldn't matter. But right now I could not put my arms around her. Not if she was blue with cold.

The streets below were darkened canyons; only the tops of the tallest buildings still caught the last rays of the sinking sun. Now more than ever the streets of this ersatz city looked like a piece of clever trick photography, blown up from some dedicated hobbyist's tabletop model. No lights: that was what really convinced me. Not a light to be



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

seen as far as the eye could see. No street lights. No lighted windows in any of the buildings. No moving lights on any of the streets. Silence. Darkness. Emptiness.

I think that's when we realized the city was really empty. There was no one here but us.

"It doesn't make any sense," Robin said, her teeth chattering as she spoke. We'd walked all the way around the deck, viewing the city from all the points of the compass. Now we faced the dying embers of the sun—an orange smear in a blue-grey cloudbank—for what little heat and cheer remained.

"But it *is* New York City," I pointed out. "I mean, this is Manhattan, and there's the Hudson River, and over there Hoboken and the New Jersey swamps."

"Maybe that train didn't take us anywhere else," she said. "Maybe this is all that's left of the city. Maybe everyone *else* is gone."

"Do you believe that?" I said. "All the details are wrong. It's like the same physical layout, but the wrong details. All those buildings with no insides in them, the obsolete street signs, the wrong subway station. Uh-uh. This is *a* New York City all right—but it's not *our* New York City."

"I'm cold," she said. "And I'm scared."

## X

The elevator took us down to that vast marbelled lobby and I looked around, peering through the heavy shadows, trying to make out some detail that might tell us something. This building alone was more substancial than the others. This one had a working interior, power, lights. It was here that the airship had, for a moment, docked.

The elevator's lights went out.

Robin made a small noise and clutched at my arm. I turned and looked back. The doors still stood open, but the maw of the elevator cubical was simply a deeper black in the darkness.

"What does *that* mean?" Robin asked.

I went back to the elevator. I reached inside and groped for the row of buttons. I pushed one at random and stepped back.

Nothing. The doors didn't close. Nothing happened.

"It's dead," I said. "It's been turned off."

"Oh, God," she said. "What next?"

"Let's get out of here," I said. The lobby was suddenly oppressive in the unrelieved gloom. I led the way across its empty expanse to the grey oblong of the outer doors.

"Archer," she said, pulling me to a sudden halt. "If it was turned off—doesn't that mean someone *turned* it off?"

I shrugged. "Maybe—maybe not. You think somebody's still here?"

"I don't know. But shouldn't we at least *see?*"

"As to that, have you got a flashlight concealed anywhere on you?" I suggested. "Or a book of matches, even?"

"Oh. No. I don't," she said, defeated.

"Yeah. Neither do I. And I don't remember any other doors out of this lobby besides the street doors and the elevators."

"Oh," she said.

"But it was a good idea," I said as I led her out onto the street again.

We stood for a moment on the sidewalk, debating the direction of travel. We were on 34th Street, between Fifth and Sixth Avenues, and we had our



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

choice of continuing uptown, returning downtown, or striking east or west to a river. Somehow none of these choices struck us as particularly appealing, and the decision favored the least unattractive. We decided to continue uptown, in hopes we might find something at Times Square was still there. "It would be nice to find some place with food," was Robin's wistful comment.

Then, with a clatter that filled the wide street with echoes, an overhead door rolled up in the side of the United Dominion Building twenty yards down the street to our left, in the direction of Sixth Avenue. The sudden noise jolted me; only then did I realize we'd been talking in hushed tones in the unnatural silence of the city.

We spun to face the black opening just as a single bright light inside swept its beam out across the sidewalk. This was followed by the sounds of smoothly working machinery and a regular hissing, chuffing, rhythm. Then, framed for a moment in the garage doorway, the car appeared.

It was unlike any automobile I have ever seen—and that takes in a few I've seen in museums. It was shaped like a tall, square box, and painted a burnished, gleaming black that caught highlights and bounced reflections in a deep blue-purple. Its front end was dominated by a huge headlight which cast out a searchlight-bright beam. Directly above the light was a large, flat windshield. The entire front end of the car was square and perpendicular, and even my own memory doesn't do the thing justice in its awesomeness. Imagine a car ten or twelve feet high, maybe six feet wide, and no more than twenty feet long, sitting high off the ground on huge wheels with thick spokes and thin tires, small carriage-lamps casting soft yellow glow-spots at its corners, and that great white torch of a cyclops headlight spearing through the night.

It paused at the edge of the sidewalk, and then tilted down over the curb into the street with the lazy rolling motion of a softly-sprung, top-heavy vehicle, and turned in our direction.

"*Archer!* Make it stop. *Please,* stop it before it goes away!" Robin cried, but I was already moving. I stepped directly into the path of the car.

I wasn't being entirely stupid. The thing had no speed, and I'd already noticed that if I had to I could throw myself flat and the car would clear me with room to spare. But I had hopes that just my being there would stop the car.

I was right. With a sudden hiss of white steam pluming up from the front wheels, the car wheezed to a stop and stood rocking slowly back and forth, its light sweeping up and down over me.

I heard the driver's window snick open, and saw a head silhouetted as he leaned out, but the light was blinding me and I couldn't make him out.

"I say there, fellow!" he called down cheerfully. "What ever are you doing here?"

Robin had stayed on the sidewalk, although edging over to the curb. I raised my hand to shield against the dazzling beam of light. "That's what we'd like to talk to you about," I said. "Maybe you could help us."

"Indeed?" he replied. "What could I do for you?"

"Would you mind coming down out of that rig?" I asked.

"Well, now," he said in a thoughtful manner. "Don't know as I like the looks of this. No, I don't think I'll step down just yet, thank you."

"Then how about switching off that



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

goddamned light?" I said.

"Ahh!" he replied. "Thoughtless of me. Certainly!"

The light suddenly diminished to a soft yellow that at first I thought was after-image. He hadn't put it out; he'd just turned it down. Well, it was an improvement.

"Now, then," he said. "That better?"

"It'll do for openers," I said.

"You haven't explained yourselves yet," he reminded me.

"Neither have you," I said. I felt grumpy. I was exhausted and I really didn't want to get into some sort of clever sparring match. "The name's Archer. This is Miss Foster." I gestured at Robin as she hestitantly stepped down from the curb to join me.

"Aurmel," the driver replied cheerfully. "You folks miss the ferry?"

"We seem to have done just that," I said. "How about a lift?"

"To where?" Aurmel sounded just a little puzzled.

"Where are you headed?" Round and round.

He chuckled. "I'm just making my last out-check on the flats. Boring stuff, really. Nothing for you."

I flipped a mental coin and it came up heads. I stepped quickly around the front of the car to the driver's side. The door handle was round, a doorknob in fact. I twisted it and had the door open before Aurmel could get his head back inside. While he was banging his head on the window and struggling to regain his balance, I put a paw on him and pulled him down out of his seat. It took less time than I take telling it.

Standing on my own level, he was just a little guy. I gave him a shake, and his teeth chattered becomingly. The top of his head bobbed against my chest, and his arms flopped about uselessly

"Look, Aurmel," I said, "all the fun's gone out of it for me. No more messing around: I want some honest answers from you."

He seemed to take a big gulp of air, shake himself like a dog shedding water, and then he looked up at me. His face, in the yellow glow of the headlamp, had a strange fey quality to it. Widely spaced eyes, large and dark. Straight blond hair, trimmed in even bangs across his forehead. Straight, narrow nose. Small, prim mouth with suddenly compressed lips. Weak chin. Skinny.

"What do you want?" he asked. "Why are you doing this to me?"

"We didn't come here on your ferry," I said. "And we obviously didn't go out on it. Now suppose you tell us just where it is we are, and how we get home again from here." I gave him a small shake to settle this information in him.

His eyes grew wider and larger. "I can't imagine what you mean," he stammered. "Where do you come from, and what're you doing here?"

I squeezed down on his shoulder and felt the bones grind a little. "Look, fella," I said. My voice was flat. "So far you've just replied with questions of your own, and I'm losing my patience. It wasn't much to start with, but it is definitely going. Now give me a straight answer: where is 'here'?"

He blinked. I wondered if he would start crying in a minute. I hoped not. I was out of tissues.

"You really don't know?" he asked plaintively.

"Would I ask?" I replied, with the patience of a saint.

"This is New York City," he said.


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

## XI

I think maybe the look in my eyes was sufficiently eloquent. Or maybe Robin's sudden exclamation, "Archer—don't hurt him!" got the message across. In any case, Aurmel quickly elaborated:

"Ah, New York City Mockup 2CV16, that is. We're presently closing it up. When I'm done with my rounds, it will be dismantled."

"Dismantled," I said. "I see. This city is just a mockup—a sort of model of New York City?"

"Of course," the little man said, twisting in my grip. "What else?" He gestured with his free arm down the empty, deserted street.

"Who built it?" I asked. I asked that question calmly, simply, directly, and with my last reserves of rational intelligence.

"Why, *we* did," Aurmel said.

It was a basic problem we were facing—a failure in communication. Aurmel still assumed that somehow we *must* know what it was all about. And we didn't. Getting an answer out of him was like prying open clams—each one yielded only a taste-whetting morsel.

"Suppose you tell me about it," I said. "Suppose you just pretend I don't know anything at all and you explain it to me. Huh?"

"I'm sure I don't know what this is all about," the little man said in tones that said he was humoring me, "but this is, of course, an experimental reality. Its catalogue number is 2CV16, and it was set up to study broad reality projections on the Harmann Question. Because of Harmann's, ahh, rather low priority scale rating, it is a simple outline, with no complex minutae. The study was completed earlier this afternoon, and it is now D-minus-190 minutes, give or take a few, of course." He was wearing a watch or something like a watch on the arm I was holding, but I didn't release him so he could look at it, despite the way he squirmed. "I have a great deal to be done in the next three hours," he added, "and I would appreciate it if you would release me and let me go on about my duties."

"Just what *are* your duties?" I asked.

He gave me a suffering look, but answered the question: "I'm just the custodian," he said. "It's my job to check for unwarrented anomalies, loose ends, that sort of thing. Before we close everything down, I mean."

"Anomalies," I repeated. "Loose ends. I think *we're* what you're looking for."

"Ahh, how's that again?"

I shook him and his teeth rattled again. "Us, birdbrain. Her and me." I pointed at Robin. "Anomalies. We don't belong here. We don't want to be here. We have no business here. We'd like to go home."

"But—but, the ferry," Aurmel protested. "Why weren't you on the ferry?"

"We didn't reach it in time," I said.

"But it can't take off without you," he said. "Why, that's impossible. If it brought you, it has to take you."

"It did not bring us," I said heavily, putting weight on each word.

"What did?"

"I wish I knew," I said, shrugging. "One minute we're riding the subway. The next minute we're here."

"The—subway?" the little man asked, goggling. "You were riding—the subway?"

I sighed. "Yeah. Subway. You know: little trains that run under the streets. Subways."

"Yes," he said gravely. "I see. Yes. Well, now I *am* on the spot."



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Tell me about it," I suggested.

"I'm afraid I've told you too much already," he said. "I'm very much afraid I have told you entirely too much."

"You haven't told us anything at all!" Robin said, her impatience finally breaking her silence.

Aurmel transferred his gaze to her, and seemed to give her a good looking-over for the first time. Then I felt his shoulder muscles tense under my hand. "That ring!" he said, his voice suddenly lower, but more intense.

I glanced at Robin's ring, but didn't let my attention stray from Aurmel. He was up to something.

"What about it?" Robin asked. She lifted her right hand and held the ring up to the light of the car's muted headlamp. The stone caught the yellow light and fragmented it into a flashing prism of greens and purples. I risked a closer look and saw that what I'd taken for a simple birthstone, a dimestore ring, had an unusually well-crafted setting and looked both older and more expensive than I'd realized. "What about my ring?"

"You—" Aurmel looked up at me for a moment and then swung back to stare at the ring as Robin brandished it "—you have been deceiving me."

*"What about the ring?"* I bore down a bit heavily on his shoulder and a sudden gasp of pain escaped him.

"You must surely know, having used it," he said. "It is highly illegal, you know. You will be reported."

"Let's go back to our game," I said. "You remember: you were pretending we knew nothing and you were explaining it all."

"Is this some sort of test?" Aurmel asked. His voice shook.

"Yeah. It's a test of my temper," I said. "You're losing."

"I don't understand it," the little man said. "I don't understand it at all."

"You don't need to. Start with the ring."

"It's obviously a contraband crystal," he said. "I can see that. And I suppose that explains what you're doing here. Thought you'd escape to a nice quiet trysting place, I suppose."

*"Explain the ring,"* I said. I was feeling ominous. I wondered if I could growl if I put my mind to it.

He shrugged. "The crystal," he said, "is one tuned to psionic pressures, and can be controlled to create alternate probabilities."

"You're saying that with that ring we *created* this place?"

"No, of course not. *We* created 2CV16. You just tuned in on it. I suppose you *thought* you were mocking up a fresh world of your own. Whoever sold it to you must not have explained its properties to you very well."

I locked glances with Robin. Her expression was stricken. "It's my mother's," she said quietly. "A family heirloom. I've worn it for years."

Aurmel sneered. "To be sure! And of course it escaped the notice of the Emperor's Agents by sheer chance!"

"Tell me about these probability worlds," I said. "What is it—some sort of time travel?"

"Of course not! Time travel is impossible, as any under-boy knows!"

"Sure," I said, really wanting to understand this whole crazy mess. "Sure it is. But this place—New York City Mockup 2CV16—is real?"

"No, not really. Not in the sense the Empire is. But, within its own terms, in its own context, it is real." He kicked his shoe against the street. "Real enough."


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"But you people mocked it up. You people created it."

"Yes. Of course."

"With a crystal—like in Robin's ring."

"Several, I should imagine, and bigger ones, but—yes."

"And now you're finished with it."

"Yes."

"You're about to take it down, to *uncreate* it."

"Exactly."

"*Why?*"

## XII

It started making sense. To begin with, there was an Empire, ruled by some sort of Emperor. Aurmel never did go into details. Some time back, the Emperor, or maybe an earlier emperor, had discovered the crystals. They resonated to the special frequencies of thought. They caught and amplified the micro-electrical impulses of one's brain. And in so doing, they allowed one to think up, to create, whole worlds. The holder of the crystal could enter his made-up world and it would be as real as his own. But he had control over it. It would be exactly as he desired it.

It was kind of nice to think about: the idea that anyone could turn his dreams into a private reality, but at the same time share it with anyone he wished. Yeah, wishful thinking into hard reality. Nice. Sure. So does the Emperor let that happen? No, he snaps up all the crystals he can find, and he exploits them purely for his own satisfaction.

He mocks up probability 'projections.' The sonuvabitch uses the crystals to mock up probable futures that would grow out of specific decisions on his part. And then he sends research teams into these worlds to check them out, study them, and report on them.

Call it second sight, or call it hindsight: for this Emperor they are both the same. Either way it gives him fantastic control over his world. He doesn't have to take any chances. No chances at all.

And this New York City 2CV16 is one such projection. What was the question? What decision on the Emperor's part would have led to this hollow city? I put it to Aurmel, but he just said he didn't know, and what did we think a simple probability custodian was, privy to the Secrets of the Empire? But, he added, the city had been much more solid. It had had people.

"But, what happened to them?" Robin asked.

"Dismantled," Aurmel laconically replied.

"Dead?" I asked.

"Unborn," he said. "Unmade. This city is a shell of itself now; it's being closed down. The energy, the crystals are needed elsewhere. I have only to clean up the loose ends, and it will be completely finished." He wormed a look at his watch. "That's in D-minus-167 minutes. I really have no more time!"

"Maybe you'll just have to *make* some time," I said. "It's all very well for you to say her ring brought us here—that's about as easy to accept as anything else around here—but how do we get home again?"

"The way you came," he said, witheringly. "What else?"

I shook him some more and he explained, wincing a little as I continued to knead his sore shoulder.

"Your projection into this world is via your crystal. Therefore, you are under the control of that crystal. It and only it will remove you again. I can do nothing. Not even if I wished. My


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

own reality here is under the control of the Emperor's crystal network, and I will be removed automatically, at D-minus-30 minutes."

"So you're saying that if that ring brought us here, it will take us back?" I asked. "How?"

"How should I know? I'm not an Operator. I don't have anything to do with the crystals. I know one when I see it, but I've never used one myself."

"What—what if we can't figure out how to use it?" Robin asked. "I mean, when this world is . . . dismantled?"

"Then you will, I presume, be dismantled right along with it," Aurmel said smugly. "And I consider it a fitting fate for your ilk."

"I don't know," I mused. "If her ring brought us here, then I don't think we'd disappear when everything else does. Not if the rest of this is controlled by different crystals . . ."

"Sure," Aurmel sneered. "You might survive—in an airless, spaceless, nothingless void."

## XIII

We sat on the curb at the corner of 42nd St. and Broadway and stared at Robin's ring. High above us a new (or old—my knowledge of phases isn't that good) moon smiled its thin watery light over the deserted intersection. The stone in Robin's ring glinted pale pinks and turquoises.

I'd let Aurmel go. I'd roughed him up enough to vent most of my frustration and I was no longer angry when I released him; I just felt enormously exhausted, my mind draned and empty of emotion. The little man had climbed into his car and then accellerated down the block with a hiss of steam and the chirp of tires. I'd made a point of getting out of his way and he didn't try to go up over the curb after me, but just took off as fast as he could. We watched the yellow carriage lamps disappear around a corner, and then he was gone.

We'd talked about it then. I told Robin that I really didn't know what to do next. My own watch said we had something over two and a half hours left.

"It's *your ring*," I told her, "I'm just along for the ride."

So we'd started to walk, mostly because the night was cool and the exercise kept our blood circulating. I could have stopped and sprawled on the sidewalk and fallen asleep in moments, but I trudged along beside the girl while we talked, turning it all over in our minds, and reaching absolutely no conclusions at all.

And then we were standing on the edge of Times Square. We'd intended to walk up to Times Square, and I guess I'd followed that plan unconsciously, even now that it no longer really mattered.

"I liked it better when it was just an empty city," Robin said.

"Before it became a doomed empty city, you mean," I said.

"Yes," she agreed.

We looked around, and the streets were dark canyons, the buildings tall black blocks. The moon was risen, but its light was too faint to read a newspaper by. Not that any were to be had.

So we talked about the ring, and how maybe its crystal vibrated to her thoughts and had projected us here. Only, why at just precisely that moment? And why had it brought me? Why *here*?

And Robin had said, "Maybe it wasn't



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

just *my* thoughts. I mean, sure, I was feeling very low right then, on that train, and I was depressed and I guess I wanted to escape, maybe even into a world without people—but that wasn't the *first* time I'd felt that way, and the ring never did anything for me *before.*"

Very slowly the thought penetrated my numbed brain, and I said, "You mean, what special situation occurred *then*, that hadn't before?" And the answer was suddenly quite obvious. "I bumped into you. You swung out of your seat and pitched right into me."

"I threw out my hand," Robin said, suddenly excited, "my *right* hand—to stop myself."

"And your ring was in contact with both of us at a moment of emotional intensity, a time when we were both depressed, tired, irritated . . ."

"And that's when it all happened," she said. "That's when the old man fell over and everything!"

"It took both of us," I said. "The combination of our thoughts."

Which explains why we were sitting there, staring at her ring. I'd taken her right hand in mine and we sat facing each other, arms on elbows, like we were going to Indian wrestle. Her hand was tiny in mine, and my big fingers wrapped around hers. The crystal was warm against the side of my forefinger, and it seemed to me its depths were alive with moving color. I stared at it and tried to concentrate.

"Nothing's happening," Robin said.

"Maybe we have to think about one specific place—together," I said. "What part of the city do we each know well?"

"The subway station? The one we really wanted, I mean?" she suggested.

"The uptown side," I said. "The one we usually wait in. We know it better." I closed my eyes. "Think about it. There's that green token booth, with the barred window like a teller's cage, and the little light inside right over the place where you shove your money in and the tokens come out . . ."

"And the big old turnstiles," Robin breathed. "They have that big, heavy ka-thunk when you push through them."

"Just beyond," I whispered. "To your left is a vending machine on a piller that sells candy."

"It's always out. I always lose nickels on it."

"Yeah. And when the local comes into the station, the rails vibrate and you know it's not another express zooming past."

"Do—do you feel anything?" she asked, voice almost too low for me to hear.

For a moment I thought I felt a vibration under me. I opened my eyes and looked up at her. Thin moonlight washed over her face, leaving her eyes sunken shadows. Beyond, Times Square, dark and empty. No change.

"For a moment—" I said.

She shook her head. "It isn't going to work, is it?"

I let go of her hand and laboriously pushed myself to my feet. My legs were numbed, and I began to get shooting pains in them as they woke up. "I think we're stuck," I said.

"Hey?" she said, reaching her hands up to me. I pulled her up to her feet. "I'm sorry," she said. "It's not your fault."

I put my arm around her. She snuggled in under it.

"It's nobody's fault," I said. I glanced at my watch.

"What time is it?"

"Half an hour left," I said. "More or less."

"He's gone, then."

"Aurmel? Yes, I guess so."



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"An unpleasant little man."

"Yes," I said. "A product of his society, I'd guess."

"Archer?"

"What?"

"Where do you think they come from? Aurmel and his Emperor, I mean?"

"I don't know. Not that it matters much. I'm not sure I even believe in Aurmel and his Emperor," I said. "Maybe that was all just a cock-and-bull story he told us."

"But if it's true—he didn't come from *our* world, did he?"

"Hard to believe it. We have no Empire, no Emperor that I know of. Besides which, he said this was a projection of their future. Doesn't strike me as particularly futuristic," I pointed out.

"I don't get it."

"Me neither. But that airship—that was his 'ferry', I guess. You remember how it faded right out of the sky?"

I felt a shudder pass over her. "Before it was completely gone," she said, "it *changed*. I wonder where it was going."

Then the moon went out.

Blackness descended over us like a great enveloping cloak. Robin's grip on me tightened. "It's starting!" she cried.

I looked up into the sky. It was as black as if the stars in the heavens had never existed. The moon—directly overhead only moments before—was gone. The stars were gone. Nothing. No light—no source of light at all.

The blackness surrounded us. The absense of light was complete. I could see no outlines of the nearby buildings, glimpse nothing of Robin's frightened figure hudling against me. I shut my eyes and squeezed them and brilliant optical flashes danced before them. I opened my eyes again and all that I could see were the after-images.

Robin swayed against me, and I shifted my stance. Suddenly my sense of balance was gone and I was swaying back and forth, staggering, trying to keep upright on my feet but totally unable to judge my position. Robin cried out again, and I felt her stumble. I was still holding her, and I couldn't keep my balance. Throwing out my hands before me, I fell to the sidewalk.

"Are—you all right?" she asked. Sitting down was easier. With firm concrete solidly under me, I felt a little better. I was grateful I hadn't fallen on Robin—and a vision twisted its way through my imagination: our bodies entangled, confused, hands groping blindly, panic building. I took several slow deep breaths to calm myself.

Robin's hand found my shoe, and then my leg. Then she pulled herself into a sitting position next to me. I seemed to sense her body close to mine although we didn't touch. My skin seemed to register her body heat. Don't ask me if it really did; I don't know.

I kept looking around, hoping to see a light somewhere. Several times I thought I saw a dim glow, but when I turned my head the glow followed—a minor, anxiety-induced, hallucination. I didn't say anything about it to Robin. Instead I tried to keep up a slow, steady running commentary on things inconsequential, soothingly spoken to reassure Robin and to stem my own budding panic. Robin told me later I talked mostly of my childhood. I can't remember any of it.

When Robin broke into my reminiscenses to say "Look up there!" my eyes were closed and it took me a moment to realize there was something to see. I raised my head, but forgot to open


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

my eyes; perhaps I had already accepted the blackness as a permanent personal blindness. In any case, I had found it easier to keep my eyes closed and pretend I was shutting out light, than to look about wildly with wide eyes in that utter night.

*Tiny white lines were visibly crawling across the sky.*

Once more I could make out the silhouettes of the nearby buildings framed against that strangely unstarry sky. As the filaments grew, touched, criss-crossed and thickened, the light became strong enough for us to see each other again, and suddenly I felt fat and foolish sprawled on the sidewalk as though clutching at it in infantile terror. We climbed almost sheepishly to our feet and stood again, our necks craned back as we watched the strange procession of events above us.

What had begun as tiny porcelain cracks were now broadening, extending, racing back and forth across each other until it seemed they should split, quarter, and sunder the black sky. Suddenly a huge gaping hole opened in the sky almost directly over us. Something made a vast sound, like the rending of fabric amplified a million times. And then, with the impact of the crash somewhere in the city beyond, came a great cyclonic wind that tore at us and threw us against the nearby building wall—a shock wave that passed over us and left in its wake a choking dust and a thousand other collapsing sounds.

The sky was falling.

When we looked up again, we could see other patches of cold enameled white in the cracked and crumbling sky, and these cast enough light for us to see our surroundings clearly.

To the east, down 42nd St., a great bite of skyline was missing. The Chrysler Building—or whatever passed for it in this mockup world—was down, and everything else for blocks around it. The falling chunk of sky—well, what else could I call it?—had missed us by only half a mile or less. And when the whole sky is falling, that's *close.*

I felt something tugging at my arm and when I looked down I saw that Robin's mouth was working even though I couldn't hear a thing she was saying. A hollow roaring sound seemed to fill my ears, and whether it was the after-effect of the shock wave, or the continuously fresh assault of sound I don't know. I tried to answer her, and I couldn't even hear myself.

She was pointing, and gesturing, and at first I thought she was hysterical. Here I was, standing calmly in the middle of the end of the world, the winds of chaos whirling about me, and this slight figure of a girl was going crazy. I wanted to laugh at the cosmic hillarity of it, but then I saw that she was gesturing at a dark hole in the ground, a subway entrance, and that she wanted to take cover in it.

I didn't want to follow her.

Understand me: in those few moments I was not sane. There is something awe-defying and electrical in standing firm in the face of universal destruction. I wanted to roar a little, to bare my chest and beat it with my fists. I wanted to strut before Doom. I wanted to go out like a man.

What is it Robin had called us? Losers? You can't lose any bigger than this—with the shards of the heavens falling about you. It's a grandeloquent way to go. Few are granted the opportunity.

I was not sane.

But she tugged at me, that girl. She wouldn't abandon me, and I saw, in my moment of all-knowing wisdom and


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

compassion, that she would not go on without me and that more than anything she wanted to duck down into that hole in the ground, into that illusive sanctuary. She was caught between two elemental desires—to run, and to stay with me. I saw that, and I was humbled.

And then I ran. Clasping her hand, sudden fear twisting deep into my cowardly guts, I ran with her, stumbling as the sidewalk under us seemed to vibrate, to tilt upwards, and then to slam down again. We gained the steps into the stygian hole, and fell over our own feet as we leaped down them.

Man is a cave-dwelling creature. That's what the anthropologists say, and I believe them. Because in that moment I felt it in my genes: an awareness of safety, a need to crawl into a hole. Gods stalked the heavens tonight, and men kept themselves hidden in their caves.

But even as I knew this, and felt it deep within me, my conscious mind was weeping, crying out that this feeling, this *knowledge* even, of safety was a lie, a fraud, a cruel and hopeless illusion that must soon perish as the world perished. I knew this, and as we stumbled down those uneven steps I felt tears coursing down my dusty face, tears I made no effort to control.

Then, in the darkness of the passageway ahead, I saw a firefly-glimmer of light. I felt Robin's hand close tighter on my own, the ring on her finger cutting into the flesh of my fingers, and I knew she saw it too. It was a yellow light, old, faded, musty, forgotten—and a relief to the eyes after the starkness of that cold white light of doom etched across the black skies that still lurked in memory behind my retinas.

Stubbing our toes, catching our feet on hidden debris, we ran through the quaking passageway towards the light. Then, as we rounded a corner, we saw it clearly: a row of old, incandescent lights strung in little wire cages across the low ceiling before a token booth and a set of turnstiles.

It made no sense. I saw them, and knew them—good, old, T.A. 36-watt bulbs, of the kind they used to have before fluorescents replaced them in the subway system—and it made no sense to be seeing them here, now, lit and functioning. But there they were: I could not —did not—question them. They were a signpost, an arrow, and they pointed the way through the turnstiles and beyond, to a stairs that led again downwards. Still running, I lifted Robin over the turnstiles and then vaulted them. The lights glowed brighter ahead of us as we reached the stairs.

We ran down the stairs, our footing more sure, the strange, irrational hope burning more certainly in me.

And it was there, waiting for us, on the downtown local track: the South Ferry-bound IRT Seventh Avenue Local.

## XIV

That should be the end of the story. A few words about how we breathlessly boarded the train, the doors wheezed shut, and the train accellerated smoothly and quickly out of a station I never quite had a good look at. It was an empty train, just four cars, but when it stopped at 34th St., it was *our* 34th St.; and a few people—normal, human-looking people—got on. One of them exuded the odor of cheap alcohol and promptly laid himself down on one of the seats and began snoring. Yeah, we

(Continued on page 44)



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# A GUIDE TO THE CITY

*Lin Carter is best-known for his swashbuckling fantasies and Conan pastiches, but here he offers a very different side of his writing talent with a grim and totally involving surreal work which may . . . or may not . . . be a work of fiction—*

# LIN CARTER

"That which is truly enormous can neither be comprehended nor ignored . . . such is the complexity of life, itself." *Empedocles*

It will be remembered that even so prominent a scholar as the late, brilliant Smith-Brown failed, by his very own admission, to cover satisfactorily this subject in Vol. XXXI of his masterwork, *A History of the City.* His ambitious attempt at a systematic survey of the City degenerated, after several hundred pages, into (to use Brown-Green's phrase) "a mere listing of important streets and major structures," although it was distinctly superior to the work previously standard in the field, Brown-Jones' *Prominent Places,* which itself had superceded, some generations before, the centuries-old *Outline of Main Centers* (variously attributed by leading politographers either to Black-Smith, Jones-Green, or the nigh-legendary "Smith-Jones", himself). The subject of compiling a reliable and *complete* "guide to the City" would seem, therefore, a hopeless task, indeed, if not actually impossible (as Johnson-Brown suggests in his noted monograph).

Indeed, is politography anything more than a blind-alley of scholarship? In my own territory, the Purple Neighborhood, more than eleven thousand structures have been noted (the precise figure varies, of course, from expert to expert) and most of them are in a state of considerable disrepair, although still inhabited by those thousands dispossessed by the Twenty-Year Fire which reduced the Third North Sub-Section to blackened rubble. The recent tri-annual *Catalogue of Streets,* which rests on my desk this very moment, its familiar purple covers much thumbed with use, lists six thousand main thoroughfares (ignoring the minor sub-streets, alleys and interblock passageways). Parenthetically, has anyone else noticed the large number of discrepancies between the streets listed in the last *Catalogue* and those given in the more complete but overtechnical *Streets and Avenues of the Purple Neighborhood: A Personal Memoir,* by the brilliant vialogist, Smith-Smith? I have marked 647 such descrepancies, not only of number or name, but also in *point of fact.* Some thruways once listed in *Streets and Avenues* as "major arteries" simply do not appear at all in the latest *Catalogue.* My wife, a former 963rd-Streeter, firmly remembers one from childhood, the Nineteenth Eastern


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Avenue Bridge Park South Concourse, listed in Smith-Smith, but *no longer appearing* in the *Catalogue*[1]. As my wife puts it, "A street cannot simply cease to exist—or can it?"

With such puzzling errors cropping up in virtually every book, how then could a "guide to the City" ever be successfully assembled? By a longterm team of politographers, working perhaps over generations? Such a project is, in fact, said to have been launched about five centuries ago, in the Yellow Neighborhood.[2]

Under the leadership of someone with the rather improbable name of Jameson-Farmer, the Great Survey Team (to condense the fable given in White-Johnson's entertaining account) conducted their politographic analysis *en masse,* traveling thirty blocks every six months, then settling to survey the locale, collating data and moving on. These intrepid explorers, traveling with an entourage of wives, children, secretaries and servants, trained their descendants in each politographical discipline, so that their children could carry on with the work of the parents, as they dropped along the way. After a reputed 76 years, during which time the Great Survey Team is said to have covered nearly 200,000 blocks, this mighty project came to an end when the great-grandson of Jameson-Farmer committed suicide. Our White-Johnson concludes on a somewhat wistful note, speculating that somewhere in the unknown North-Central Sector of the (equally unknown) Yellow Neighborhood, the vast files and statistical records of the Great Survey Team moulder, ignored and forgotten to this day.

No matter how appealing and romantic this little story may be, to ambitious junior scholars of the younger generation (I need only mention the name of Jones-Johnson-Jones), the Great Survey Team, its adventurous heroes and its lost treasure of maps and records, is doubtless as much of an idle dream as the mythical and omniscient "City Government", which dwells in its remote and splendid palace, the so-called "City Hall", familiar to all of us from our childhood days.[3]

Such dreams as mapping "the entire City" must, therefore, remain a vain and idle pursuit, similar to the studies of architectural incongruities followed by such minds as Jones-Black, Jones-Parker and other "pseudo-scholars". That such incongruities exist is, of course, beyond dispute: the upside-down stairway on the *outside* of my own residential building is well-known all

1. I sought to check the existence (or lack of same) of this particular street with the 963rd-Streeter politographer, White-Black, but my several letters seem to have gone astray. At least I have received no reply.

2. Or so White-Johnson claims in his **Local Legends**, v.IX, pp. 1047-9. He is reputed to have heard the story from the lips of an "authentic" Yellow Neighborhooder, a dying explorer who had reached White-Johnson's local 1327th Street hospital just before passing away. This story is considered little more than an amusing fable by his other locale-mythologists, such as Green-Smith. I need hardly remind my reader that the fabulous Yellow Neighborhood is supposed to exist at least a quarter-million blocks south of our own. It would take quite a bit longer than a human lifetime to accomplish such a fantastic journey! Green-White, in **Neighborhood Adventures**, pp. 2104-24, recounts the longest trip on record, that of a 3367th-Streeter (whose name has been lost, unfortunately) who covered an area of nearly 100,000 blocks in his lifetime of adventure. Alas, that such daring seems to have died out!

3. I well remember the charming tales my maternal great-grandfather, the celebrated vialogist Green-Brown, used to relate to us children. Stories of such god-like beings as "The Great Mayor" and how he built "the Subways" (whatever they were supposed to be!) and how all of these marvelous people lived in the center of the City! I was too young, then, to have heard the famous maxim of the philosopher White-White: "That which has no end can have no center".


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

over my locale, as is the peculiar triangular and hexagonal holes—some measuring seventy-five to one hundred feet in width!—that appear in walls, roofs and floors in the Upper 237th Street Southwest River View Boulevard locale, or the ten-foot pegs that protrude from the middle of the 6377th Street North Bridge Sub-Highway (spaced every twenty feet for a full sixteen miles, starting at the Sixteenth Great Triangle South Intersection) or, for that matter, the doors complete with knobs found *upside down* and *on the ceiling* in every seventy-third level of my wife's home-block; but whatever purpose lay behind such mysterious constructions is forever beyond conjecture, and the thing to do is, like all normal people, simply ignore their existence. To do otherwise may very well lead one into the dim bypaths of metaphysical or occult speculations, where wander sad and lost souls, such as those deluded mystics who believe they can foretell the future from abstruse computations based on measurements of such incongruities as the above, or those pitiful cultists who conceive that the secret wisdom of the superhuman "City-Builders" is concealed by cypher and symbol, behind the eternal enigma of those seemingly-meaningless architectural aberrations. At the end of that street (or, I should say, at the center of that labyrinth) lies madness.

But to return to the everyday, from our brief excursion into the occult, let us further consider the claims of the mathematicians, especially the distinguished Jones-Johnson the Younger. Collating the known number of structures with the known number of streets in his locale (the same Lower South Central Concourse 7714b that produced White-Black, the famous poet of my father's day), he propounded the theorem that every ten square blocks contains an average of 32 buildings and 18 streets (including alleys and interblock passageways); since there are an average of 42 such 10-block locales to a Sector, and roughly 132 Sectors to the Sub-Quadrant, and 16 (or, as some politographers of the Purple Neighborhood claim, 32) Sub-Quadrants to the Neighborhood, that gives us an estimate of 2,822,528 *buildings* (or twice that, namely 5,645,056) and 1,596,672 *streets* (or 3,193,344) to each Neighborhood, a total of either 4,419,200 or 8,838,406 different politographical features to be covered in our proposed survey. Could any man examine and note either four or nine-million features in his lifetime, even presuming he could travel such an area? The answer, of course, is "No".

And what about the rest of the City? The exact number of Neighborhoods is of course beyond any human knowledge. The total recorded in politography, history, myth and folklore is something like 670 .... but that is only the total known in the literature of *our particular Neighborhood* (or at least in my locale of it; I have not traveled extensively, due to the sedentary nature of those of us given to the scholarly disciplines) and probably wildly inaccurate. Other Neighborhoods may, beyond question, have different totals according to their own historical and mythical records which one could hardly expect would duplicate our own, due to the extreme difficulty involved in inter-Neighborhood travelling.[4]

4. In the interests of brevity, I shall, for the purpose of this monograph, ignore the claims of the Divisionist and the Semipolitan cults that each seven (or eight) hundred Neighborhoods are grouped into larger divisions of the City, called "Boroughs"; or the even more fantastic doctrines of the Suprapolitans regarding the remote existence of something called "the Suburbs".

(Continued on page 50)



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# TEN PERCENT OF GLORY
## *VERGE FORAY*

Plus ca change, plus c'est la meme chose, *as Our Founder was wont to say upon occasion: The more things change, the more they remain the same . . . as this story so aptly illustrates—*

Ah, Miss Krimsby, I'm glad to see you on the job so promptly. While I was alive, I always believed in giving the old job a full day's effort. That's a policy I intend to maintain here in the realm of the spirit. I feel we owe that to our clients . . . Hum? . . . Yes, Miss Krimsby. I'll be busy going over the preliminaries for our explorers campaign, but not too busy to accept important calls . . .

. . . What now, Miss Krimsby? . . . Certainly, I'll talk to him. Put him on . . .

Well, Senator, I'm honored to hear from you. We met on Earth once . . . No, I didn't vote for you, but only because my home was in Connecticut. I was rooting for you all the way, Senator . . . Thank *you,* Senator. I hope you're getting accustomed to the place . . . Good. If I can be of any help . . .

Oh? Why, certainly, the firm would be honored to have you as a client . . . How's that? . . . I see. Well, that's your decision to make, Senator. Of course we would prefer to sign you on immediately, and get busy on a long-term program for you, but you're the boss. I might add, though, that we're prepared to accept you now on a straight commission basis, and later on we may have to start you on the fee system at a time when you will have far less remembrance-power than now. Those fees can dip pretty deep into a soul's capital, so to speak. Heh-heh-heh . . .

Now, Senator . . . Please, Mr. Senator . . . Look Senator, baby, don't take it that way! This is a respected remembrance agency dedicated to the best interests of our clients. We *earn* our commissions and fees! How long do you think we could hold our reputation if we tried to bilk every new soul that wanders in? . . .

Let me explain the situation, Senator, before you say another word. First, look about you at the other souls in the realm. You'll notice that, on the average, they just don't compare with you in brilliance and radiating power. The reason is, as you must have learned by now, that these are average souls, souls-in-the-street we might say. They are remembered, at the most, by a hundred or so relatives and friends, and for only a few decades. After that, they draw what little brilliance they display from the background of remembrance-power that is spread through the realm.

You're not like them, Senator, baby, not like them at all. You're a member of the Lustrous Company, the greats of



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

history at whom remembrance-power is constantly being directed by millions of the living! That's what sets the Lustrous apart from the ordinary, what gives you high-magnitude radiance.

Now you've been mingling since you arrived with the Lustrous set, Senator, baby. Tell me this: how many of them are Senators who died more than twenty years ago? . . . Right! And how many Senators who've been dead fifty years? . . . Of course you haven't met one yet, because there aren't any to meet, except a few like Hank Clay who're best remembered for other reasons.

I'll tell you why that is, Senator. Most politicians arrive here in a blaze of glory, riding on a surge of remembrance brought on by their funerals. The first thing they know they're mingling with boys like Bill Shakespeare, Julie the Caesar, Genghis Khan, Ben Franklin, Johnny Bach, and so on. Now I don't mean this critically, baby, but politicians have a good opinion of themselves to begin with. When they get here and are slapped on the back by old G. Washington himself, *nobody* can tell them they're not all set for eternity!

Then, five or ten years later, it's *pouf!* down the drain. For most of them. The people back on Earth have quit thinking about them, and they shrink down to normal soul size.

That's when most of them come running to me or some other remembrance agent, but it's too late then, baby! They don't bring us enough to work with, more often than not. You have to understand, Senator, baby, that it's a thousand times easier to keep your memory alive than to rebuild it from nothing.

So you can accuse me, if you like, of trying to bilk you out of ten per cent of the remembrance-power that's coming in now, and that you achieved without my help. If you want to keep that attitude, all I can say is good luck to you, baby! Gleam it up for the next few years! You've won that privilege. But if you want to start thinking about the long term—and up here, baby, the long term is *long*—then we can talk business. Get the picture? . . .

*Who's* trying to rush you? Not me! Any time within the next week will be fine with us. Talk it over with your acquaintances in the Lustrous Company. See what they say . . . How's that? . . . I'd rather not, Senator, baby . . . No, I don't mingle with the Lustrous myself, although I don't mind admitting that my remembrance-power commissions give me a fair magnitude. A good remembrance agent, like a good press agent back on Earth, is one who keeps himself out of the limelight. You do the shining, and I'll keep my light hidden under a bushel. Heh-heh-heh. . . No, I'm afraid I'm too busy to meet you personally, and there's no need of that, anyway, as the mode of communication we're using now is quite adequate. Although I do appreciate your asking me . . .

. . . Very well, Senator, baby. But remember: don't wait too long. Two weeks at the most, and that's more for your own good than mine. Every day you delay is going to work against you . . . Goodbye . . .

Are you there, Miss Krimsby? . . . Okay, make a note to turn the Senator over to Lanny if he calls back and wants to be taken on . . . Yeah, within two weeks. The best we can do for him, I'm afraid, is the folk-hero routine. Lanny's doing a good job on the Davy Crocket account, and maybe he can



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

use the same techniques to keep this new pigeon flying for a century or so . . . No, no long-term potential at all. Carry on, Miss Krimsby . . .

. . . Yes? . . . Who? . . . Oh, Ludwig, baby! How are ya? What's on your deep and sonorous mind today, baby?

Oh, come on, now Ludwig! I can't believe the great Beethoven is jealous of such a minor composer as—what did you say his name is, Luddy, baby? . . . Jean Sibelius? Oh, sure, I remember him now, a guy recently from Finland . . . Well, you got to remember he *is* recent, and was a national hero when he came across to us. He'll start fading soon, and you'll still be right up there, Luddy, baby . . . Oh yes, we're working hard on your account all the time—after all, you're just about the biggest we've got . . .

Hum? . . . Well, we're prompting more and more performances of the Ninth Symphony—we're letting the Fifth and Seventh rest for a few decades right now. Also, we're doing something rather experimental with comic strips for you. The idea is to by-pass the formal education systems (which are in a confused mess at the moment, anyway) and use other medias to plant your name in the retentive minds of millions of children . . .

No, that won't counter Sibelius's national hero status, not immediately, anyhow. But in the long pull . . . Well, if it's bothering you, Luddy, baby, I'll try to come up with something. Hey, here's an idea. Rebels are the "in" thing on Earth right now, so why not inspire one of the turned-on writers to give you a build-up along those lines? Something like: *Beethoven, Fighter for Self-Expression?* How does that hit you, baby? . . . Okay, the agency will get right to work on it . . . Right. I'll keep in touch, Luddy, baby. Goodbye . . .

(Eech! What a grouch!) . . . Miss Krimsby? That Sibelius fella might have potential. Beethoven's in a stew over him, which must mean something. What's the latest info on him? . . . Still the strong, silent type, hah? Well, if he's not talking to anybody, chances are he's still unrepresented. Put a couple of the boys on him. When he starts talking, I want him to talk to us first . . .

Oh, you've already done that, Miss Krimsby? . . . Fine! That's what I like to see, sweety—intelligent initiative. Keep up the good work . . .

Who? . . . Yes, but don't call him Mark Twain even when he calls himself that. Let him know you're aware he's Mr. Clemens . . .

Hi, Sam, what's the good word? . . . Why, thanks, Sam, I appreciate that. Thoughtful of you to mention it. What can I do for you today? . . . Nothing? What . . . You mean to say you called just to congratulate me on my promotion to managing partner of the agency? . . . Sam, you—you've got me all choked up! If there were such things as angels, you'd sure as hell be one, Sam. If all our clients were like you . . . Sorry, Sam, I didn't mean to go mushy like that, but you caught me by surprise . . .

Well, since you're one guy I can speak frankly to, Sam, I don't mind telling you I feel pretty damn smug over the whole thing. Of course I give the senior partners in the firm a lot of credit. They've been in business a long time, but they're on their toes every minute, and they didn't take long in grasping the advantages of having a modern public relations man like myself running things. Nothing stodgy about those guys! . . .

Oh, no, Sam, I'm no genius. Of course


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I have a bright idea occasionally, and I'm glad that one turned out so well. The hard part was to find just the right actor to portray you. Once we found the Holbrook lad, all we had to do was pour the inspiration to him . . . heh-heh-heh! Yeah, Sam, I bet you're collecting far more remembrance-power than you ever did royalties. That's often the way it is with the true greats, Sam . . . Thanks, and if you want anything from us, all you have to do . . . Okay, Sam. So long . . .

. . . Miss Krimsby, were you listening to that? . . . Then I don't have to explain why I'd like us to do something special for Sam Clemens, and I've got an idea . . . An international build-up is what I have in mind—new translations of *Sawyer* and *Finn*, written to appeal to modern minds. We'll want European translators who'll work a background of passionate sex into the stories (maybe Tom and Becky could fool around while they're lost in that cave) and the editions for the communist countries ought to be given a socialist ring. The boys in our international letters department can work out the details . . .

How's that again, Miss Krimsby?. . . Say, that's a good idea. Put the boys to work on that, too. You are really earning that last raise you received, Miss Krimsby, and at this rate the next one won't be long in coming . . . Heh-heh-heh! It's a pleasure working with *you*, Miss Krimsby! . . .

. . . Well, I might as well talk to him. Put him on . . . How are you today, President Fillmore? . . . I'm sorry to hear that . . . That's too bad, but you have to see the situation like it is, Milly, baby, and the truth is that ex-Presidents are a dime a dozen . . . Oh, sure, there are exceptions, but not many . . .

Don't be that way, Milly, baby. It's just the way the universe cycles, and we all have to accept it. Look at the vast majority of Roman emperors—they're merely touched upon in history books today, almost completely forgotten. That's true of former crowned heads the world over. There's just so *damned many* ex-rulers, Milly, baby! If you could have gotten yourself assassinated, or could have won or lost a war, things might be different for you. But you just didn't provide us much to work with, Milly, baby . . .

That's always your privilege, if you think some other firm can handle you better, Milly, baby. Of course, we'll keep working hard for you, but I really can't promise any improvement. And if some other agency is promising you anything like that—well, just bear in mind that we've always been honest with you, even when honesty hurt . . . Milly, baby, if you fall for a fee-basis arrangement, you'll be down to soul-in-the-street magnitude in no time at all! If you insist on changing agents, insist on your new man giving you a straight ten per cent commission deal . . .

That's more like it, Milly, baby . . . Sure, I understand. If I were in your shoes, I'd get impatient at times myself, seeing my magnitude almost lost in the glare of so many newcomers who, despite the tremendous remembrance-power they're drawing, are basically trivial souls . . . That's right, all those disreputable actors and montebanks, Milly, baby, but they always fade fast. They haven't got the staying power—the security—that you have, even though they outshine you temporarily . . . Right. Call me any time, Milly, baby . . .

. . . Miss Krimsby . . . Send a memo to accounting, will you? I want a comparative-profit study on all the Ameri-


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

can President accounts previous to—make it previous to Teddy Roosevelt, and excluding Washington and Lincoln . . . That's right. I think it may be time to trim some deadwood off our client list. But they're still our clients in the meantime, so instruct operations to inspire a television special titled *Our Forgotten Presidents.* That ought to brighten them up for a while, and keep them off my back . . .

. . . *He's* calling *me?* . . . Did—did he say what it's about? . . . Not even a hint? . . . Yes, yes, Miss Krimsby, put him on. Mustn't keep the senior partner waiting . . . And don't monitor this one . . .

. . . Niccolo! I'm flattered that you called . . . How are you today, sir? . . . A personnel matter? Certainly I'll give it my immediate attention, sir . . . *What?* . . . Not Miss *Krimsby,* sir! Why, I can hardly believe . . . She did? . . . She did? . . . Oh, no! That's awful, sir! . . .

No, sir, she can have no possible excuse. Our entire staff is thoroughly briefed on the necessity of *never* showing themselves in public. And being right at the center of our activities, she would be even more aware than the others that we can't afford to be seen, outshining as we do all but the brightest members of the Luminous Company . . .

Ah? . . . I see, sir . . . A crush on Clark Gable, huh? I knew she was ambitious for some reason, but I assumed her motivation was the same as my own, and the firm's other loyal members . . . So she had to show off in his presence . . .

Yes, Niccolo, she'll be drained and discharged immediately, but I'm afraid the matter doesn't end there. The Luminous Company is going to be in an uproar over this. Our agency will almost certainly be investigated, and all of us will have to appear personally . . . No, sir, it won't be sufficient to have her confess the embezzlement of working remembrance-power from the agency. Although that's a necessary first step . . .

No, sir, I'm afraid we don't have that much time. You see, sir, a newly-arrived American Senator—a prospective client—was talking with me earlier today, and he was suspiciously persistent about interviewing me in person before he made his decision . . . Yes, I draw the same conclusion as you, sir, that the news of Miss Krimsby's disasterous indiscretion is already getting around . . .

Thank you for your confidence in my ability to deal with this emergency, sir. What I propose is this: all partners and staff members will drain their accumulated magnitude down to levels appropriate for the firm's image. For myself and the other partners, except yourself, sir, I believe a Ben Franklin magnitude would be about right. For the staff people—perhaps the Gracie Allen size would be suitable.

These magnitudes are high enough to demand respect, you will note, sir, but not so high as to seem out of line. They will bear out our claim that we operate on a tight margin of profit, converting almost all of our earnings into inspiration which is expended in behalf of our clients . . .

Your magnitude, sir? . . . Since you mingle with the Luminous, sir, we couldn't change yours if we wanted to. Also, you have been more prudent than the rest of us in your participation in the firm's success, and have increased your magnitude no more than might be explained by the popularity of your book, *The Prince* . . .

Where do we drain to? That *is* a problem, sir. We can't simply drain into the firm's working capital of remembrance-power. That will surely be investigated, too. I'm afraid we'll actually have to expend the overage in inspiration, sir,


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and pour it out on Earth . . .

No, it will be no problem to dump that much inspiration on Earth without producing effects the investigators would notice. I'll make it inspiration for peace, and as you know, sir, the living take delight in *fighting* for peace. The inspiration will be practically invisible, heh-heh! . . . No, sir, it won't be enough to start a war—at least not a major one . . .

I agree, sir. This depletion of capital is going to set the firm back at least five centuries, and believe me, you can't be as heartbroken about it as I. To think, this had to happen under my management! . . . Well—yes, sir, we have to take these things in stride . . . you can count on me to handle the whole affair with discretion and dispatch, sir. Goodbye . . .

*Miss Krimsby!* . . . Miss Krimsby, why in the name of all the mythological gods and devils—*why did you have to go prancing out in public, outshining the Virgin Mary?*

—Verge Foray

(Continued from page 35)

were home again.

You might be wondering about Robin Foster. Well, I found her a job as a receptionist for a buddy of mine who sells insurance, and I see her once in a while at his office. She smiles at me, but we don't talk much. She still remembers all the things she told me about herself, you see, and it's different now, back in the real world.

We found we'd been gone for something not much less than a day; it was going on ten p.m. when we both got off at the Christopher St. station and split to go to our respective homes. I checked a newspaper for the date, told Robin I'd see about getting her that job, and went home to bed, where I lay awake for hours, just running it all through my head.

It had to be that ring of hers that saved us, even if we couldn't make it work in a conscious, deliberate way. It had taken us away from our world when we'd felt its pressures were too great for us, and it had returned us when we *had*—on a real, gut level—to get back. It worked only when in contact with both of us, and it worked on some peruliar combination of our combined unconscious drives known only to it. (The next day Robin told me she wasn't wearing it any more. That seemed altogether sensible, and I said as much.)

So much, so good. But *where* had that ring taken us? Had it made up Mockup 2CV16 on its own, complete with Good Buddy Aurmel, and all the rest of that mystifying Empire? Or was there really such an Empire into whose own Mockup we'd intruded? I tended towards the former explanation. No such Empire has ever existed in *our* past history, and the Law of Occam's Razor, to which I have a monthly subscription, advises the simplest solution be accepted. Whole cloth: the crystal had made up the whole works, final scenario and all. Maybe it had a secret itch to be a psychotherapist; I know New York City, crummy uncollected garbage and all, has never looked so good to me, and I have never been more glad to be alive, long-time loser or not. An experience like that teaches you something—if you survive it.

So that is where this story really ought to end.

Except that today, while I was walking through Herald Square, on 34th St., just east of Macy's, I saw this funny little guy with blond hair and bangs who looked just like Aurmel.

And when he saw me, he did a double-take, and ran.

Towards the Empire State Building.

—Ted White



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*Satire in the sf field is rarely encountered, but we think both fans and foes of the controversial "New Thing" will enjoy—*

# *MAN SWINGS SF*
# RICHARD LUPOFF

INTRODUCTION by Blodwen Blenheim, editor

*You say I'm lost*
*I disagree*
*The map has changed*
*And with it me.*

What's going on inside the covers of this book is something that will startle you. It's a new thing, a new phenomenon, a whole new way of writing —of thinking!—in the field of speculative fiction.

*The ice caps are melting*
*The tide is rushing in*
*All the world is drowning*
*To wash away our sin.*

The forerunner of the new thing in speculative fiction was science fiction, primarily an American phenomenon, and resembling the new thing about as much as pithecanthropus erectus resembled *homo sapiens sapiente.*

*Things that bother you*
*They don't bother me*
*I'm so happy and gay,*
*Living in the sun light*
*Laughing in the moon light*
*Having a wonderful time.*

But the new thing, new wave, call it what you will, originated, of all places, on the Isle of Man in the English Channel. The new wave writers have thrown away such old and constricting shibboleths as plot, character and setting.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*I think I'd die with delight*
*I'd want to call and love you tonight*
*Out on the old front porch.*

For these shackles and conformities they have substituted a new and startling insight into the vacuity and nullth of existence.

*One eye is brown*
*The other is brown*
*I am a fish*
*I swim around*

Instead of the juvenile objectives preached by the obsolete science fiction, jejune ideas like the attainment of earthly utopia, the establishment of universal freedom, or the conquest of space . . .

*And if I kiss you in the garden*
*In the moonlight*
*Will you pardon me?*

. . . speculative fiction offers a mature view of universal, realistic, objective despair.

*Come tip-toe through the tulips with me.*

Excerpts quoted above are from *God Bless Tiny Tim* by Tiny Tim; Reprise Records, 1968.

In The Kitchen

□ OVA HAMLET

*1. The Chair.* Sitting slumped in the ordinary armless wooden chair, his thoughts drifting sadly like dead dogs left to rot in overgrown fields of antic hay while flies and maggots, their carapaces throwing back sickly gleaming glimmers of reflected sunlight, gorged upon odiously decomposing flesh, Mordant gazed about himself, wondering whether Dolores had as yet completed her toilet upstairs, and would shortly descend to join him for their sad ritual tea.

The flesh in Mordant's lower limbs clung flaccidly to the stickily varnished mahagony, his mottled legs, hairly extensile, projecting beyond the stained bottom hems of his aged khacki shorts like the hirsute quivering limbs of a stencheous arachnid nervously awaiting its overdue but inevitable repast. He gazed resignedly at the wilted lettuce and over-aged steak tartare uninvitingly set upon the chipped and yellowing china, then lifted his fork, noticing the fleckings



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of dried egg yolk that clung between the bent and rusting tines like excressences of long dead scavenger birds adhering to the dried and yellow bones of a napalmed water buffalo somehow transported to this miasma-laden quarter, to fall through putrescence and dissolution into the nothingness of unaltered time.

He lifted a pale veined hand to rub the itching varicose ulcer that punctuated the left side of his neck, wondering when, if ever, the poultices and assurances of Dr. Glumbly would have their effect. Mordant wondered why Dr. Glumbly had implied that even the smallest of neck-nicks could prove dangerous in the sinister era which seemed to have decended upon their region, not unlike unto the descent of a diseased and moribund sea skate, its flesh torn and trailing whitely through slowly concatenating shafts of dull and mote-speckled light.

But at least Dolores seemed always to appear at the approach of Dr. Glumbly, and in spite of her cold and distant attitude of recent months, Mordant found her presence a strangely disquieting experience to which he seemed irresistably drawn, like a sexton bug responding to the ineffable call of the rustling sound of its fellows, scurrying on jointed multiple legs to the presence of a recently dead field rodent.

*2. The Superheterodyne Radio.* Unable to endure longer the distress and discomfort of waiting unoccupied in the kitchen for the impending descent of Dolores, Mordant placed his age-smoothed fork carelessly on the edge of his plate noting helplessly the ear-shattering descent of another small chink of china knocked loose by the implement. Thinking perhaps to find comfort in leaving the room and walking to visit his friends Sombre and Necro in their rotting houseboat that lay mired in the organically teeming mud that seemed to encroach daily upon the stagnant and putrescent waters of Lake Zaharoff, Mordant had got as far as the center of the kitchen when his eye was caught and his intellect staggered like a hairy gorilla recoiling at the impact of an unexpected shotgun blast by the presence on a warped and rotting balsa shelf of a marred and ragged artifact.

Mordant stood trembling, unable to decide whether to continue his interrupted progress toward the door or return to the rickety and unpleasant support of the mahagony chair. Staring heads of him at the artifact he noted its ungraceful contours, its dark brown and mottled wooden case, the openings panelled with a brown and dusty cloth of crude and sinister weave.

Feeling that he had become trapped in a strange and menacing zone in which time did not flow at its usual rate but could, instead, accelerate, halt, or reverse its flow, Mordant reached one clawlike veined arm toward the ancient superheterodyne. Dr. Glumbly had warned him and Dolores against excessive excitation, thus effectively cancelling that strange and frigidly compulsive relationship that they had enjoyed for years in the dusty and mildew-haunted double bed they no longer shared, but Mordant determined to pursue this new obsession to its conclusion, irrespective of Glumbly or Dolores or of the new and menacing relationship which he seemed to sense developing between the two.

*3. The Hallway.* The varicose ulcer below Mordant's ear throbbed and itched as it always did in times of stress. He


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

siezed a cracked and deformed plastic knob on the front of the superheterodyne, not even caring that as he did so a hangnail on his left ring finger was caught in a fissure on the side of the knob, effectively tearing the thick and jagged fingernail as he convulsively twisted the knob, bringing the electrical appliance to a reluctant and disquieting life.

After a period of timeless and distressing stasis during which the superheterodyne's ancient and yellowing tubes struggled fitfully to a mean and baleful glow, the speaker emitted an ear-torturing yowl of static interference, a sound that rose and then fluttered fitfully to the room's splintrous and untended planking floor, there to lie unmoving like a poisoned nymph, wings twitching and carapace gleaming dully in the weak yellow glow of a fitful and unpleasant electric bulb.

A voice emerged from the ancient device, warning listeners in the region of a long-anticipated and depressing but unspecific doom. When the announcer at last gave way to the baleful tones of a sales message for the mortuary services of the local embalmer, Mordant reached beyond the dull and partially rotted wood of the superheterodyne cabinet and pulled its frayed and dangerous cord from the moss-encrusted and long disused socket.

From the dust-choked and dim hallway above the kitchen, Mordant heard the thin and unpleasant sound of Dolores calling to him that she had nearly completed dressing her chronic thigh and abdominal infection with the ointment provided by Dr. Glumbly as a lagniappe on the occasion of his last visit to treat Mordant's ulcerated neck. Mordant did not reply, but instead, his lips trembling like the dead leaves on a lightning-blasted oak about to be torn loose in the baleful wind of an ice-storm, moved cautiously toward the front of the house.

*4. The Front Door.* Determined to reach Sombre and Necro's rotting houseboat beneath the sere and wilted trees that overhung the swamp-like, sweltering edges of Lake Zaharoff like slavering lions hovering beyond the cave mouths of giant rodents' dens, Mordant fled the kitchen with its odorous and uninviting meal. The rock-floored foyer of the ancient building that he had shared uncommunicatively with Dolores since the last visit of Dr. Glumbly felt clammy and unpleasant beneath his gnarled and pain-ridden feet.

He stopped and waited at the front door, unable to bring himself to perform the unheralded and sinister act of penetrating beyond the moist and crowded edifice into the oppressive and sun-blasted heat of the declining afternoon outside. Neither Sombre nor Necro was aware of his impending visit, and he hesitated to arrive at the houseboat unexpected, perhaps to interrupt the strange and disquieting experiments which Sombre and Necro, assisted by their silent and unresponsive black servant Mbwaggie, were prone to perform on oil-smothered and sickly tortoises which they captured in the hot and fecund mud that lay baking beneath the blinding glare of the sun along Lake Zaharoff.

Hesitating to close his cold and trembling hand about the rusting and discolored wrought-iron spear points that made up the scrollery of the front door of his ancient and unpleasant domicile, Mordant at last managed a convulsive heave of the shoulder, a movement resembling that of a confused and mor-


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tally wounded moose attempting to disengage its antlers from a round and furiously active hornets' nest.

The door swung open with a ponderous movement, its ancient hinges, layers of mildew and mold covering the long-accumulated rust, emitting a shriek of protest that sounded to Mordant like the death-rattle of an aged horned owl, protesting the loss of a glimmering and decayed piece of offal to the savage swoop of a greater and crueler bird.

Mordant, impaled on the rusted and decaying iron spear point of the closing door, felt unable to regret the likelihood that Dolores would now offer his portion of wilted lettuce leaf and decayed steak tartare, its odor carrying to the nostrils a baleful and sinister memoire of days past in insect-like activity and menace, to the weighty and ever-impending Dr. Glumbly.

OVA HAMLET . . .

. . . wrote "In the Kitchen" during the pauses between giving birth to quintuplets in July, 1966.

I had been experimenting with the concept of the condensed novel, as originated by Jimmy-wimmy Boom-booms, as his friends call him. I decided to advance to the concept of the condensed epic, and write as many "volumes" as there were pauses between births.

Ova was born in Nottinghamshire in 1949, raised in a convent school. She is now the wife of her former guardian, Sir Duncan Hamlet.

Dunk, I call 'im, or Donkey when he irks me. He calls me Eggs.

About Ova Hamlet, the *Platelet,* class yearbook of Our Glorious Lady of the Syncopated Heart, had this to say:

> Class prankster, never to be forgotten originator of the incident of Sister Ananias Saltimbanco and the disappearing pepper mill; Ova distinguished herself as gossip columnist of *Gloriosky Ogler,* school paper.

I was expelled from Our Glorious Lady a week before graduation for what the Sisters called "unladilike conduct," but it was too late to take my name and picture out of the *Platelet.*


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Writing in the *Oxchester Review,* Aleksander Ottington-Smythe commented on Ova's first published story, "Incident in the Dessert Queue at the Joss Mansions Cafeteria" (old *New Worlds,* December, 1965):

> If this story is really typical of the coming thing in what was once tolerantly accepted in the name of 'science fiction,' I can only suppose that science fiction has run its course, and I say, good riddance.

Well, that's Sandy all over.

> It takes a critic of the perception of an Ottington-Smythe to realize that the old labels no longer apply, the old barriers are falling, or have already fallen, and the very term, science fiction, is really obsolete in today's context.

Over all Sandy that's, well.
Over Sandy, that's all well.
Well over Sandy, that's all.
All over that, Sandy's well.

—Richard A. Lupoff

---

(Continued from page 38)

Faced with such enormous numbers of buildings and streets, any proposed survey to explore, or research to compose a "guide to the City" must inevitably seem the mad dream of a seriously deranged mind. Since even the generations-long expedition of the so-called Great Survey Team (if ever it existed in historical fact) was a total failure—could any other such expedition succeed?

No . . . I fear that a "guide to the City" shall never, and, indeed, *could* never, be written. Our knowledge of our own locale, Sector, Sub-Quadrant and Neighborhood we must ever add to, preserve, and pass on to our children, and our children must be trained to do the same to their children, vigilantly comparing the records of one age with those of the last so that the puzzling, indeed, the disquieting phenomenon that my wife refers to as "Disappearing streets and changing buildings" can be eliminated from our life-experience (it is doubtless the result of faulty observation, or of the hasty recording of mere hear-say information *verbatim,* and nothing to worry about). A full and complete "guide to the City" is quite beyond the abilities of mankind, and, unless one of the legendary "City Councilors" — perhaps "The Great Mayor", himself!—hands such knowledge down to us, from the omnipotent height of "City Hall", such a book shall never exist at all.

—Lin Carter


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# FANTASY FANDOM

A MODEST MANIFESTO
by Terry Carr

"I'm leavin' here this morning
with a smile upon my face.
I'm beginning to think there's
hope for the human race."
—Nilsson

A fascinating thing is happening in fandom these days. It's also happening in science fiction itself, and in the Great World Out There. Primarily it's happening Out There, really, but that science fiction people should be not only responsive to mundane movements but in some ways in the forefront of them is a source of surprise and hope for me.

There's this cultural revolution taking place right before our eyes, and I say honestly that nothing has so jogged my sense of wonder since the ancient Mars-god Rhiannon answered Matt Carse's call in *The Sea-Kings of Mars*. I'm not talking solely of hippies and pot and love power or lack of same, though they're all in there too; I'm not talking about the New Wave as such, either. (As a matter of fact, I think "the New Wave" is already an outmoded concept, as I hope to get around to explaining a bit later.) All these things are part of the revolution, together with Marshall McLuhan and the Negro revolutionists and *Laugh-In* and Eugene McCarthy and the Baycon. Student power. Underground comix. Vietnam.

A random list of "In" phenomena and controversies? No, not quite. For the first time since I've been alive I believe I see truly hopeful signs for the future of people in this country, eventually for people the world over (if we have any luck at all continuing to stave off the Bomb). Because this time it isn't just politicians making promises; this time it isn't just disgusted societal dropouts writing bitter polemics in verse and prose because not enough people agree with them to make political or social action practical; this time there's a tremendous and growing body of opinion in favor of change in this country, and the revolution is gaining momentum. It's the kids, the 17-year-olds (or maybe even 14-year-olds) who'll be voting in the next Presidential election: for once they're going to shape the future, rather than be shaped by it.

Look at the *Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*. Pretty standard format, with songs and jokes and skits and the union-required dance numbers, and at the end of the hour the cast stands and waves while the credits roll in front of them. But notice that two or three of them are holding up two fingers in a "V" sign. If you don't know what that means, ask the clean-cut honor student next door; *he* knows.

Today in the mail I got a fanzine that was as bad a crudzine as any I've seen since the great days of *Thurban I* and *Looking Backward*. It was ineptly typed, crudely written, badly reproduced, with execrable artwork shakily stenciled, book reviews that were often just plot summaries and a story of which I had only to read three random lines to know there was no need to read more. But: the editor, the contributors, the lettercol hacks were at least talking about the right subjects for once. I was astounded; not only were they praising


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Delany and Lafferty and Zelazny and putting down reactionaries like Lester del Rey and John J. Pierce and Sam Moskowitz, but there were filler quotes from Dick Gregory and Bob Dylan and Archibald MacLeish, and in the middle of the book section was a review of Yevtoshenko's new book of poems. This from a group of young fans probably about 14 or 15.

They didn't understand it all, they wrote some silly and naive things, but give them a few years, Meyer.

There was a discussion of the "New Wave" at the Milford SF Writers' Conference last summer, and one of the main bits of information that came out was that the new writers mostly came to fiction writing by way of poetry. But poetry is dead, you say; no one has paid attention to it outside college classes since the twenties, or at best since Dylan Thomas died. Wrong. Poetry has snuck back into popular culture, disguised as song lyrics. Donovan, Bob Dylan, Lennon-McCartney, John Phillips, Marty Balin, Paul Simon, Janis Ian, Brian Wilson, Leonard Cohen . . . they're just a few of the people on the rock-pop scene who are mixing poetry and melody, raising rock from the oop-shoop atrocities and pop from the depths of moon and June. The kids are listening to the words today, not just the beat, and the words are giving them a new kind of consciousness, a poet's consciousness.

Fancy words, but I don't mean anything fancy by them. That's just the point: poetry is no longer fancy; it's commonplace. Poetry is, if you will, a non-linear medium as opposed to the point-by-point development we're used to in most fiction, science fiction or mainstream. And this *is* a post-McLuhan world, where the techniques of television commercials are among the most sophisticated forms of communication ever developed. *Laugh-In* exploited a number of these techniques, with a pair of stand-up comics about as talented as Martin & Lewis and a flock of gags straight out of vaudeville, and suddenly it's the hottest television show in years. Richard Lester showed us in *A Hard Day's Night* that collage-scenes can add a new dimension to the movie (or tv) screen, and half the directors in the world, including Lester himself, have been copying the idea ever since, with mixed but interesting results.

Non-linearity is an approach you wouldn't expect to see flourishing in science fiction, a form of fiction until recently measured by its rigorous attention to logic, which is linear as hell. But so much of the most popular sf today ignores logic—is a-logical—that it's clear the forces spotted by McLuhan are at work here too.

This can go too far, I believe. Chip Delany told me last week, "What most intelligent people like about science fiction is invention, ideas, new juxtapositions, new viewpoints. What they don't care about at all is plot." I don't believe this for a moment, but I do agree that the emphasis has shifted away from pure story values—and I mean on the part of the readers as well as the writers. *The Einstein Intersection*'s plot is rudimentary, but it has so many other things going for it that this doesn't matter. And is anyone going to tell me he voted for Zelazny's *Lord of Light* for the Hugo because of its plot? (*LoL* does have a fine, and rather complicated, plot—but how many of you were concerned enough with it to work it all out? Was it, therefore, of prime importance?)

What's happening outside our little



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

world of sf and fandom is obviously having a profound effect on the microcosm.

The Baycon? Somebody wrote me a paragraph's worth of impressions:

> The convention hotel is a sprawling, gothic semi-circle. The oxygen inside is inadequate and you must thread your way to the emergency room, the square, stapled-on patio, to breathe. Here it is not the same. You look up into the night and find a lighted attic window, the outlines of a madwoman holding a candle. The fire exits are laundry chutes, you were told; you do not like to think where they end. The corridors are wide and winding. They have absorbed every known type of halitosis and breathe it back at you as you wait for the elevator that never comes. The rooms have a simple push-button lock while outside Berkeley simmers with "incidents" that threaten to spread to the parking lot, the lobby, the incense-clouded light show. A knock at the door brings silence inside. Maybe it's only a *Star Trek* fan wanting to get in. The coffee shop is a prop, the waiting room to somewhere else. Somewhere else is a huge expanse of tables supervised by waitresses who order the food from the Leamington. (Is that where the laundry chute ends?) Nothing is real. Joe Frap from IBM turns up high in love beads, and somebody's grandmother is freaking out in the pay toilet. The revolution is happening now, inside and outside. Meanwhile, back where the action is supposed to be, the scotch and bourbon flow at the usual rate and the people are talking shop while all the shops are boarded up and the hotel radio pipes in acid rock from nine to two a.m. The costume ball is redundant. "What's new?" is not an idle question.

That's a good capsule commentary, though I'm sure a lot of fans and pros won't recognize the con *they* were at in its descriptions. Not surprising: it was an amazingly fragmented convention—not just because the hotel was sprawling, nor because so many attendees had to find rooms at outside hotels like the Leamington, but because there were so many different types of people there that it was a potpourri of conventions. As in years past, it splintered off into an sf convention, a fannish con, a Burroughs dum-dum, a comicscon, a gaggle of monster fans and a babble of Star Trekkers; this time though, add the generation gap. A lot of hippies came over from the Haight-Ashbury or up from Telegraph Avenue, but these weren't outsiders; the hippies are very turned on to science fiction these days. (They're even going through some of the growing pains regular sf fandom had to endure: water-brotherhood a la Heinlein, even Scientology. I had a flash-fantasy about hippie first, second, even seventh fandoms, but I resolutely shove it aside as too grotesque.) Conversely, a fantastic number of the newer, younger sf readers are turned on to hippie phenomena. When Harry Harrison, seconding Columbus' bid for the '69 worldcon, asked the audience what kind of music they'd want at the costume ball, the response was an overwhelming *"ROCK!"* And though it would be impossible to judge how many of the fans—and pros—were turned on to other things at the con, I do know that a criminology major at Cal dropped by the con to go out to dinner with his brother and said, "I was in the lobby for five minutes and I saw


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

at least four narcotics agents I know by name." There were no arrests, however, nor even raids that I heard of.

Yes, a lot of generation gap. The newer fans and the hippies were sometimes indistinguishable; the First Fandomites must've been appalled. Norman Spinrad, Roger Zelazny, Harlan Ellison were surrounded by the young fans; the older fans seemed to be flocking to Larry Niven and hailing him as the second coming of E. E. Smith. The Baycon was so fragmented in these various ways that it seemed like a collage-con. And maybe it was: maybe the Baycon was the first of a new kind of sf convention, the post-McLuhan convention.

I know that one of the standard lines of the con was "Isn't this a *weird* convention?" Nobody could quite seem to put his finger on the theme of the con, the running set of topics and preoccupations that would characterize it in our memories later. (As, for instance, the NYCon3 was the "New Wave" vs. "Old Wave" convention, and the '68 Lunacon was where everybody argued about *2001*.) This one wasn't unified in that way, so it seemed strange. Yet, despite numerous gripes about the hotel, the banquet, lack of air conditioning, etc., when it was all over the feeling seemed to be unanimous that it had been a fine, fine con, and the conreports I've seen so far seem to bear this out. Maybe (just maybe—I'm only speculating) this is another sign that sf fans no longer feel the need for a totally ordered universe, a logical, linear environment.

McLuhan again: In the tight little island that used to be our in-group, patterns could be perceived and defined; in the global village that has now stretched its borders to include our territory, phenomena pile on top of one another and must be understood like a collage.

I'm not in favor of all this, either the fannish and stfnal aspects or those of the world around us. As a white man, I'm threatened by the black revolution even though I'm in favor of most of its goals; the probabilities are that I'm going to have to give up some of the more gracious aspects of living I've worked for, as that revolution progresses. I don't think I'll begrudge giving up my fair share to repay the dues my father and his father never paid, but the nature of revolutions is that many people get hurt, lose more than is their "share." And I think there's danger of drug abuse, too—not just because amphetamines can cook people's brains and LSD freak out people of certain psychological dispositions, but marijuana abuse too. We're told pot is no worse than alcohol and doesn't give you hangovers either, so it should be legalized. I'll buy that; but some of the same people who advance the first line say they feel no compunctions about driving a car when high on pot. Seems to me that's just as bad as driving while drunk on alcohol—and if we're to accept the comparison on one hand, we should accept it across the board. Is it a necessary result of a non-linear world-view that one-for-one relationships like this are lost to us?

I also hold a little corner of my heart aloof from the very, very nice talking and writing and singing about Love that we hear from the flower children. I think the hippies' emphasis on love is fine, perhaps beautiful; but it's too often naive. I know they believe love is the answer, I know they want to love everyone and have everyone love everyone—but *why* do they believe it, *why* do they so desperately want it? The hippie


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

phenomenon is a middle-class one: kids from well-to-do homes get sick of hypocrisy and materialistic values, so they drop out, leave home and try a new kind of life. But what was the underlying emotion they had when they made this decision? Love? Or maybe hate? And if the latter, which I think is the more understandable and probable, then what emotional response is it likely to set off in these kids? I think it's guilt, and I think *that's* where the love generation's at, all too frequently. Not to belabor a rather superficial Freudian point, you can't so thoroughly reject your parents and not feel guilty about it; and if hate is mixed in there, what better psychological prop than a commitment to love? When that gentle kid in the Village hands you a flower next spring, don't doubt that it represents love—but remember the fertilizer that grew it. And don't be too surprised if, on a day when he just can't make it, he dumps the fertilizer in your hand instead.

Norman Spinrad has written a very powerful novelet about just this; it'll be in *Orbit 5*. It's about an acid-rock group that grooves behind the H-bomb. It's well worth reading—and after you've read it, you might take a look at the jacket for the latest (as of Nov. 2, 1968) Jefferson Airplane album, *Crown of Creation*. It shows the group superimposed inside a beautiful color photo of a mushroom cloud. Crown of creation?

As for the effects of the cultural revolution inside science fiction, I don't like the idea that plots are irrelevant, as the non-linearists would have it. I happen to like a well-plotted story—it's not the only kind of story I can appreciate, but it's one of them. Fortunately, of course, the changes that are upon us won't be universal; we may have a swing away from pure story-telling in favor of other techniques of construction, but I don't believe that even at the height of the reaction there'll be a serious lack of people interested in writing, publishing and reading plots.

I think I see some evidences of post-McLuhan attitudes in fanzine publishing already and I don't always like them. There was a fanzine I got a month or two ago, Bill Kunkel's *Genook*, whose editorial was almost a model of non-linear development: page after page of commentary on this and that subject, usually to do with rock or politics or fans, but with no unifying theme and frequent little trip-outs, flash-fantasy schticks of imaginary conversations brought to mind by the preceding topics. It was a mixed bag, but on the whole I thought it was one of the best fanzine editorials I've read in years. Still: this guy was very much on top of what he was doing; he was *good*. I doubt many fans could handle that form, and I suspect that a bad editorial of that type would just be incoherent.

But enough of negativism. It's easy to spot the flaws and excesses in a new movement, particularly one so amorphous as this one is now during its beginnings. My *caveats* notwithstanding, I'm excited by the new vistas opening up before us. The less rigid consciousness of our mixed-media world, the greater commitments demanded by the issues that are producing violence and conscious misery in our country, the long, *long* overdue challenging of our accepted values . . . all these and more are changing our world *right now*. They are having a vastly more profound effect on the world than space flight, our great dream for the past several decades, is likely to have for a century or two. It's possible that we

(Continued on page 131)

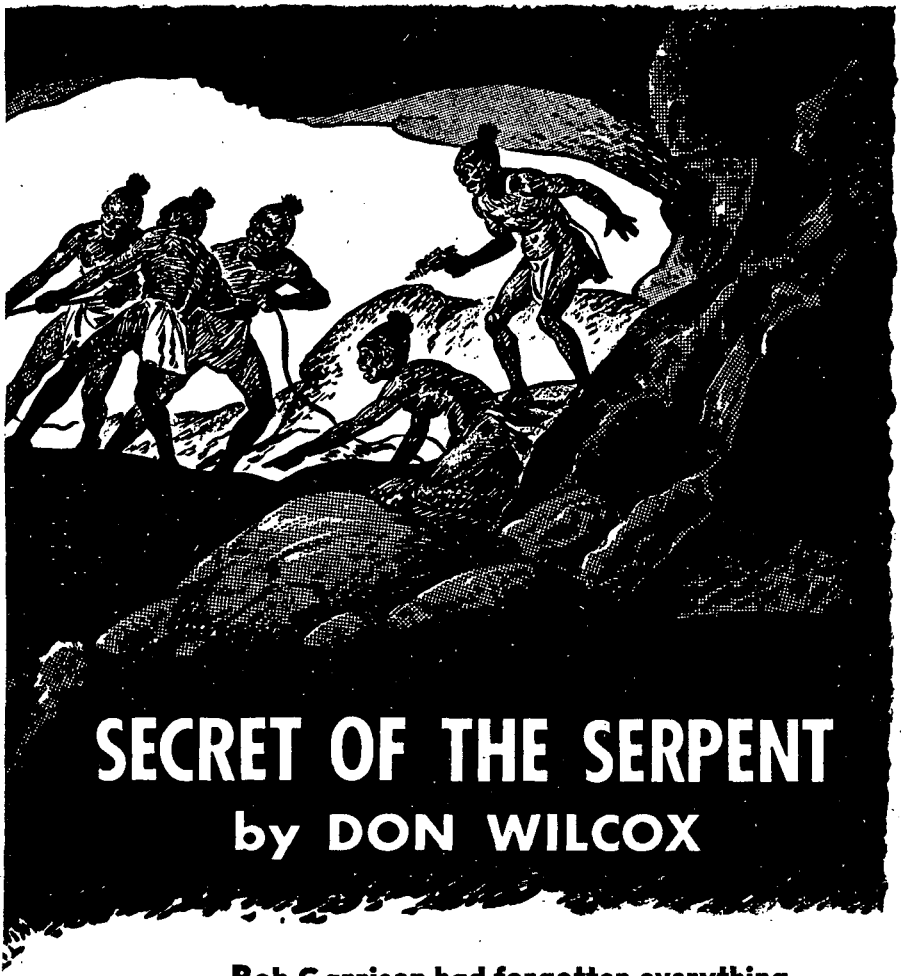


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Copyright 1948 by Ziff-Davis Publishing Co.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



# SECRET OF THE SERPENT

## by DON WILCOX

**Bob Garrison had forgotten everything about his former life — but in his new life as a serpent he had a great deal to learn**

I STRAINED to keep my head out of the water as I floundered around in the blackness, trying to find a way out. The warm air smelled of blossoms and I think I should have been lulled back to sleep if it hadn't been for the water that kept rising around me. Sleep?—how long had I been sleeping? How long had this complete blackness engulfed me? How did I happen to be here? Where did I come from? *Who was I? What was my name?*

A sickening feeling ran through the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

length of my long, coiled body. I didn't even know my own name. I had forgotten everything—everything that I was supposed to know in order to carry out my desperate purpose. *What* purpose?

*WHAT PURPOSE?*

I screamed within my mind like a woman falling to her death. There *had* been a purpose. An urgent purpose—something far more important than the life or death of any one man.

But how could I have a purpose relating to the life or death of any man when I was only a coiling, writhing mass of flesh, lost in some underground blackness, with an awful sleepiness engulfing me, and black water rising around me, and blossom-scented air lulling me into sickening illusions of nothingness.

I tried to fight the water back with my arms—*I had no arms—I had no legs*—and my efforts resulted in the random thrashing of my long, snake-like body.

*I was a serpent!*

I had been a man, and I had fallen through the dense purple clouds as a man—I was beginning to remember now. I had come to this ghastly space island, where the outcasts of the many planets were sent—to live or to die—and at the very minute that I had been sure I would land safely, I had suddenly fallen.

To die? No, to sink into a mire of blindness, deep in a crevice, where no sun-like eye of the heavens could penetrate. And there, in the slimy waters of a greenish black river, I had fought to keep my grip on those last few precious minutes of life. Broken bones, crushed skull, life's blood ebbing away, pain, pain, such burning pain, such child-like terror of the unknown that is death—and then—*merciful sleep* . . .

But now my consciousness was returning, sharp and sensitive, and my new snake-like body was finding ways to swim.

I swam cautiously, holding my serpent head about a foot and a half above the surface of the water. Presently a light broke through the deadly blackness—a streak of green which skipped along the surface of the inky waters.

The ripples of green expanded. The cavern walls gradually changed from coal-black to rock-brown, and I lifted my head to look up through hundreds of feet of vertical surfaces. The planet's outer surface would be up there somewhere, perhaps two or three miles above the waters of this deep-cut stream. I was a prisoner—yes, twice a prisoner. A prisoner of the deep crevasse and a prisoner of some ghastly trick of nature that had given me this serpent's body.

I LOOKED back, now, and studied the forty-foot length of purple and green body that was now my dwelling place. It was frightening and revolting and sickening, and I hated the sight of myself, and immediately I wished—

Oh, what a wish! What an awful thing to wish, at the very moment I was hating myself so intensely.

I wished that I could frighten someone else! I wished to see someone else revolted and sickened by the flash of my green and purple tail through these black waters.

*I would find someone!*

It was a hideous purpose, but I was a serpent, and it was my purpose. I was no longer an honored emissary from the earth who had come to this far-off space island with the purpose of *finding*—

*WHAT WAS MY PURPOSE?*

For a moment it had almost flashed back to me; but now it was gone again, and only the snake in which I dwelt could dominate my actions. I wanted


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to frighten someone, and so I swam through the twisting, sharp-edged passage.

Here the walls were only five feet apart, and as I tried my luck at climbing I discovered the strength of my coils. In the dim light I saw, for the first time, that hundreds of folds that gave form and design to my yellowish-green belly. The wall's sharp edges prodded me with only trifling jabs of discomfort. It wasn't bad, this business of crawling. It came easy. I was beginning to like it.

"If you're a snake," I said to myself, "you don't actually *mind being a snake—*"

I was speaking half aloud, and my breathy hiss fascinated me. I tried it again.

"If you're a snake—snake—s-s-s-snake—*s-s-s-s-sss!*"

My hiss echoed up through the walls and there came an answer!

*"Look out, down there!"*

It was a human voice and it rang down through the walls like a fire alarm.

*"Look out!" it cried. "There's a monster!"*

Up through the hundreds of feet of jagged brown walls I caught sight of seven or eight tiny figures of human beings who were working at the upper end of a long rope. Then I saw, as my eye followed downward to the near end of the line, the object of their warning cries. Two little men, clad in loin cloths, had been lowered to a shelf of rock not fifty feet away from my present position.

I say two *little* men, for they looked to me to be not more than two and a half or three feet tall.

"Pygmies!" I said aloud. Then, with another satisfying hiss, "Pygmiesssss!"

The two little fellows were wild with fear at the sight of me. They clambered along the perilous ledge, trying to get back to the rope by which they had been lowered. I could see that they had been working with ropes and nets of their own, evidently trying to fish something out of the river.

Things happened fast, then, for my serpent instincts worked more powerfully than my human intelligence.

One of the pygmies slipped and fell.

He struck the surface of the water with a splash. I could see him there in the deep green shadows, a black form bobbing up at the edge of the rock wall.

I slithered down to him. He screamed and struggled, but I caught him in the coils of my body and crushed him. Then my jaws opened wide and I took him in.

One quick, painful swallow, and I got him down.

The men above were firing at me now, so I swam hard back into the darkness where their rays couldn't touch me. My belly was full, and I was comfortable and secure in my warm black waters. *Except* for the dull torture of my human conscience, I was *happy* to be a serpent.

## CHAPTER II

THE first animal I met, other than the little human animals I had encountered in the river walls, was another monster, who like myself, was not quite at home in his hideous form. The very sight of him gave me a great deal of mental trouble.

If I had had no more mind than an ordinary serpent I might not have suffered any agony whatever. I might have attacked him, and either he would have killed me or I, him.

But that bothersome streak of human intelligence which I still possessed—the remnant of my previous existence,


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which was still haunting me—made me know something very important about this new monster.

It made me know that he, too, was a person who had been transformed.

I met him on the very rim of the crevasse on the morning that I found my way to the top. I had climbed through the long, long night, by the light of six different moons—or neighboring planets, I couldn't be sure which. These heavenly bodies had crossed over the deep gash that had imprisoned me for so many hours, and each time I caught sight of one, sailing slowly across my thin line of sky, I felt compelled to climb, faster and faster.

Each time one passed on, out of sight, I felt weak and exhausted from my effort and wished that I were again at the surface of the water. I belonged in the water. I was safe there. No, there was another moon sliding into sight—I must climb up toward it—faster, faster!

When the star-eye which this far-off planet called its sun at last began to gray the sky with morning I was sure that the night had lasted for scores and scores of earth hours, and I knew that there would also be a very long day ahead. It wouldn't be wise for me to start back through the deep descent until I had at least found some nourishment. Somewhere there must be more pygmies. I kept my eyes sharpened for the sight of any movement along the surface of the rocky ledge. And there, in the pink light of dawn *I saw it.*

It was large, for a cat—large enough to be a draft horse or a small elephant—but that wasn't what made it such a weird and formidable sight to my eyes. It had two heads, and its four eyes, always turned in the same direction were casting their baleful greenish-yellow glare glow at me as I ascended.

The cat-like body hardly moved. I might have expected it to bound away in fear, but it stood its ground. My coils carried me up through the last twenty feet of ascent and I worked my way, as limber as any earthworm, along the edge.

The double-headed cat-monster watched me with its four steady eyes. When my flipping tail struck a loose stone and sent it clattering down through the crevasse, the cat-monster didn't wink an eye, but simply went on staring at me. The hair began to rise on its back. Its claws emerged, thin white lines that spoke a warning.

I stopped, holding my head about four feet above the surface of the boulder upon which my chest—if it could be called a chest—had crawled to a stop. I drew my head back a few inches and slowly opened my jaws.

The cat-monster's shoulders hunched dangerously, and the beast showed his sabre teeth.

JUST then the slight rustle of feet sounded from a heap of rocks to my left, and I turned in time to see the first shot fired. The tongues of red flame darted out from the muzzles of three guns.

Pygmies again!

They were shooting at the cat-monster! One blast—two—three! Deadly rays of *zeego* fire. I had seen enough of it on the earth, I should know. Whoever the pygmies were, they possessed *zeego* ray guns that had certainly come from the earth.

My human impulse was to leap over the rocks and pounce upon the little men with my fists swinging. But human impulses were only a handicap to my new body. It worked on principles of its own, and instantly I was crawling at high speed.

With fangs bared, I pounced upon the surprised trio. Three *zeego* guns


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dropped. Two of the pygmies were running down a cliff path as hard as they could go. Their feet thudded with a fancy little rhythm that reminded me of a military drum I had heard somewhere. The other sound was the scream of the third pygmy, whose voice might have been compared to a screech of a clarinet in high register. It ended with a gurgling, choking sound as my coiling body closed around him.

One's serpent habits take hold quickly, I found. Without debating the matter, I simply gulped him down.

I would have given the other two a hard chase, then, if it hadn't been for another cry that chilled my cold blood. The monster-cat—in pain—dying? I wondered. It had certainly been struck by the rays of *zeego* fire. I slithered back over the rocks to the cliff's edge.

The creature had been struck across both of its foreheads, just above the four eyes—four greenish-yellow eyes that were wide with pain and terror.

The lids all began to close simultaneously, for a moment I thought the cat-monster was dying. Its shoulders sank and it went down, and it was shrinking—

Shrinking, smaller and smaller—crying with pain—crying with the voice of a girl—

It was transforming into something—something more nearly human. Its two heads were growing smaller. Its body was losing the fur covering, growing whiter. Pink shoulders caught the pink sunlight. Human arms were forming, clasping the breasts of its human body and then it was running from me, from one projecting rock to another, until it had hidden somewhere in the crags.

I watched, not daring to follow.

When it looked out, peering cautiously through the clump of bushes at the foot of the crags, I saw that its arms and shoulders were those of a beautiful girl. Its two heads had been reduced in size to correspond with its human body, but they were not human heads. They were feline heads, in every detail, and their four cat-like eyes were all watching me with deadly suspicion.

I went back to where the three *zeego* ray guns had fallen and wondered how I could manage to pick them up and use them.

## CHAPTER III

IT WAS a strange world, a world in which no new arrival could know his rights. In the first place he couldn't be sure that he knew *himself*. In the second place, he couldn't be sure of his own eyes when he *tried* to know his neighbors. In the third place, *how* could he be sure that anything he *did* know for sure today would be the same *tomorrow?*

If it isn't being too sarcastic, I must admit that this serpent was tying himself in knots, almost literally, for many hours to come.

When I would find a pool of water, and look in and see my new face reflected there, for a moment I would despise myself. Those evil yellowish eyes of mine were enough to make anyone hate and distrust me. The fine scales around my nose and jaws were almost as sly as my eyes, the way they would catch the tints from the rocks and trees and flowers. I knew that I *could* lurk in a pool where the pygmies came to pick the brilliant orange-colored water flowers—the *flopetals*—and I *could* catch enough protective coloration that a pygmy wouldn't see me until I sprang. I was sure I *could*, and if I ever got hungry enough I *would*.

But my powers as a serpent, as I have already hinted, were the source of much mental torture. It was bad enough to possess an animal instinct that would



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cause me to kill and devour little human beings. It was even worse to realize that these people must somehow be related to myself, as proved by the fact that (a) they were human and (b) they talked English and (c) they used earth-men's weapons.

Probably you've never had an occasion to eat a human being. But if you have, you know that *after* your stomach is filled and your soul is again at peace with the world, *then* you can feel all sorts of remorse for your evil deed.

I was remorseful regularly about every twelve hours. But just as regularly, too, I became quite hungry—and at such times I was guilty of hoping, with all of my forty-foot being, that the supply of pygmies wouldn't run out.

I hoped, too, that they wouldn't get too handy with their *zeego* guns. As a serpent, I had certain responsibilities which needed to be carried out faithfully. One of them was to take care of my prisoner.

I'm speaking of *her*.

Yes, *she* was my prisoner, and I was taking care of her. I was protecting her, too. Whenever I thought the pygmies were in danger of discovering her hiding place, I found a way to warn her that they were coming.

Her two cat-like heads were always alert to my coming, it seemed. Whenever I came crawling along the cliff path toward the cavern pool where she lived, I would hear her plunge into the water, and that was proof that she had heard me coming. Then I would see her—the two heads of her—swimming along quietly to the narrow opening in the wall of rock. Somehow it reminded me of a corner in a well planned zoo, for it was a perfect retreat from the passing public. The public, in this case, being one forty-foot purple and green serpent.

So it was that I kept her a prisoner, and cared for her, and came to think of her more as a pair of untamed cats, joined by a whimsy of nature into a single body. Either the water or the cave would conceal her body from my eyes, as a rule, and I ceased to think of her as having human qualities.

At first I had tried a few times to talk with her; but neither of her heads had offered any answers. I lapsed into a more frequent use of my warning hisses, consequently, and began to neglect my serpent's efforts to talk English.

ONE day—which is to say, many many hours after this very strange life had begun—something happened which changed everything almost with the speed of light.

A broken space ship came hurtling down out of the sky, and when it fell within five hundred feet of the surface it blew outward in dozens of pieces, like a shell exploding. The pieces must have scattered over at least a five mile radius, and there wasn't much chance, I assumed, that any band of half civilized pygmies would ever pick them up. And I was right.

But I was wrong in thinking that this rain of wreckage would go unnoticed.

From a mountain peak twenty-five or thirty miles away a whole squadron of planes came out to swish back and forth across the valley, and I knew that there was someone in these parts who was more concerned with this hail of trouble than the pygmies. Fifteen planes hummed over, as slowly as a hawk soars over a field in search of a mouse.

They came low over the edge of the crevasse.

I crawled back into a clump of bushes where I wouldn't be seen. I could see the two cat heads at the mouth of the small cave, so I knew that *she* was



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

watching too.

"Don't let them see you," I called. It was the first time I had spoken in English for many hours. *She* looked at me and folded her white arms tighter. She moved deeper into the water so that only two pink noses and four yellow eyes remained above the surface.

A few minutes later the plane drifted directly over the small pool. By this time I had guessed that they were look-down upon every bit of lake or rivulet or feeder stream that cascaded into the deep crevasse. Why, I would learn later.

One of the planes circled back over the little pool. By this time *she* was back in the cave, and I was reasonably sure that they hadn't seen either her or me. But they threw out a package as they went over and it fell toward the pool.

It burst just before it struck. It burst like a clocd of flour—or better, sulphur, for it was creamy yellow in color. It struck the surface of the water, and there was a bubbling and hissing of steam.

Then I heard *her* cry.

I tried to interpret the wail as that of two voices, not one. There was no reason, I thought, that one of the voices should cry and not the other. Yet I somehow knew, in spite of the spine-chilling echoes of the cavern, that it was only one voice. And not a feline voice, either. It was the cry of a girl.

Instantly I plunged into the pool. It was the first time that I had tried to approach *her* since that morning when I had seen her as a dangerous furry monster. The whirl of steam blinded me for a moment, and the fumes caught in my lungs and seemed to burst out through my chest—if I could call it a chest—and thudded out like pounding hammers at my shoulders—

My *shoulders?*

The fumes stung my lungs, and the steam burned at my eyes, and then suddenly it was over and the air was clear, and there was the pool of blue water, with my long snake-like body showing green and purple through the waves.

I was ashamed to be there, so close, then. For the *girl* in the cave before me thought I was being ill-mannered to intrude upon *her.*

The *girl?* Yes, with the same white arms folded tightly over her breasts, and the pink light of the sun kissing her pink shoulders. She moved down a little deeper into the water, so that only her head—her beautiful human head, with flowing dark hair, a pair of frightened dark eyes, and lips parted in speechless wonderment—showed above the surface of the water.

I *knew* this person. I had seen her before. Where? When? If I could only remember how this had all come about—

She spoke, then, breathlessly.

"Look, Bob, you have *arms* now," she said. Then, "You *are* Bob, aren't you?"

## CHAPTER IV

BEFORE I had a chance to answer, she cried, "Hide quick! They're coming!"

The hum of planes was on us almost without warning. I made a dart toward the cave—*her* cave—and at the same instant I caught sight of my own reflection in the water—my vicious-looking eyes! That was what turned me back. As a serpent I didn't trust myself to invade her private refuge. I whirled about, and the water splashed high around the rocky walls.

"Quick! Get out of sight!" she cried.

I crawled faster than I had ever crawled before. I thought I was headed in the right direction to make the clump


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of bushes before the planes came too close. But I was wrong on both counts. With my serpent's head whirling to keep watch on their approach, I missed my direction and sped right into the crevasse!

My human arms grabbed frantically at the ragged edge of rock. What a futile gesture! My muscular forty-foot body was racing too fast to be caught by a thin pair of arms. I rolled into the opening.

As I fell, I caught myself momentarily on the first ledge. My head and neck fought to catch around the rocky projections, and my hands beat at the walls for a hold. But the bulk of my body was already falling, like the loops of a cable, and if I had tried to hold fast I would surely have snapped my head off.

It was a strange thought for my mind to feed upon as I fell. Some boyhood experience was coming back to me. In the fields—in the pastures—somewhere long ago on a more friendly planet, the earth. The snakes of those fields may have been friendly, but I was a boy and a snake was a snake, and I had used to kill them by grabbing their tails and cracking them like a whip to break their necks.

I was falling, falling, down and down through two or three miles of rocky walls. I was turning, writhing, twisting, trying to widen my coiled body to catch like a steel spring within the narrowing walls.

Rip! The curve of my side struck a projection, and the green and purple pattern tore with a gash of red.

Within a hundred feet of the bottom, I managed to straighten out my body so that the loop was in a vertical plane, and the wall burns were avoided.

Splasssssssh!

What an echo, up and down through the revasse. I sank under instantly, still I heard it, and it seemed that the greenish-black waters were alive with the sounds for minutes afterward.

When my head emerged and again I began to breathe the soft blossom-filled air, my first thought was of the girl. She had called me *Bob*.

*Was I Bob?*

What had made her think that I was anything more than a slimy reptile?

The thought was too much for me, burdened as I was by a water-spanked belly and a torn side. I relaxed and failed to find the stamina I needed to keep my consciousness from ebbing away. I fainted away in serpent sleep.

## CHAPTER V

WHEN I awakened, the moons were sliding slowly over my tiny streak of sky. There would be hours of night before I should be able to see any human figures at the top of the opening. And I was hungry.

"I'm hungry," I said aloud. "It's good that *she* isn't here now."

When you speak aloud, that way, you always stop and wonder whether someone might have heard you. Maybe that's what gave me the weird feeling that someone *had* heard, and that I was in the presence of company. I tried not to rustle the waves as I stretched my neck and peered into the surrounding darkness. I listened. Nothing but the low gurgle of water and an occasional complaining murmur of my empty intestinal tract.

I made a disheartening discovery, then, and I groaned aloud. I wondered how a mountain climber would feel if he got almost to the top and then skidded on the ice and slid all the way back and had to start over.

It had taken me hours and hours of work to get to the top the first time, and here I was back in the depths again.


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But that wasn't all. *My arms and hands were gone!*

With a commendable human impulse to forego the pleasure of feasting on a pygmy (since none were likely to be handy before daybreak) I had decided to try this stream for clams or fish. There must be something, I thought, or the pygmies wouldn't have been down here with nets. But my inspiration was blasted by my discovery. My shoulders had shrunken into slight lumps where my cylindrical body enlarged below my neck. All traces of the appendages had disappeared.

Hunting clams or fish without the aid of hands wasn't going to be easy. My serpent's instinct urged me not to plow through the water with my mouth open.

I tried to think of a way out. I was too hungry to think. I needed a pygmy. I was too weak and sore to start the journey back to the surface, two or three miles overhead. I wondered. . . . Didn't any pygmies ever get lost on their way home from a celebration and tumble into this place by mistake? I didn't wish them any ill luck, and still—

The thought heartened me and I began to swim, slowly, painfully, up the stream. I feared that I might be doomed to spend much time down here, and if so I had just as well explore the whole weird river.

Curious, the sensations that accompanied me on that long night. A few minutes of moonlight filtered all the way down to my bright eyes and gave them a frightening yellow glow in the water's reflection. After the moonlight, darkness. Cloudy darkness, and rain. Thin drops that splashed over the length of me as I raised one loop after another of my rope-like body to the surface. The sky, again; again the moon. Again, that mystifying feeling that someone else was present.

"Maybe it's one of those pygmies I ate," I said aloud. I listened, unmoving, trying to determine whether my words had been answered with an ever so delicate sound—the amused puff of breath from some listener back there in the blackness.

I swam faster. I stopped suddenly and allowed the waters to swirl around me. I listened. I *did* hear the sounds of breathing—no, *whispering!*

IT WAS almost over me. Now it was retreating. I waited, and it was gone. I was tempted to follow. A human whisper was a promise of food for a hungry serpent. But I was puzzled as to how any follower could be hovering *over* me.

My plan formed slowly. It would depend upon finding a sharp turn in the river to make sure that I would not give myself away.

I plowed ahead, increasing my speed. The narrow line of night sky, high above me, was darkening again. In a few moments I came to a sharp turn that would close away any sights momentarily from my pursuer. Swishing through the turn, I applied my muscled coils to the wall and climbed up.

Good luck—I slipped out of the water almost silently, so there was no warning splash! Now—careful!

I bridged between the walls less than twenty feet above the stream's surface. The humps that would have been my shoulders rested against one side, and the coil of my belly braced solid against the other. Thus, my head and neck were free to move back and forth between the walls.

In a moment it came—a length of rope with a weight on the lower end. *I knew it!* My pursuer—or rather, *pursuers*—hung from a rope that was being moved by some guiding force two or three miles up, at the top of the crevasse.

The rope rubbed against my unseen


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

body. The occupants of the swing at the lower end coasted to a stop and dangled like an uncertain pendulum.

"What's happened?" one of them whispered.

"We've caught on something," said the other. "We'd better get loose, too, or he'll get away. He was swimming fast."

"Are you sure it was *he?* It might be the girl, you know."

"If he turned serpent, it's more likely to be a man. Here, let's kick the wall together and maybe we'll jar loose. By George, I can see something right above us. Looks like it bridges all the way across. Where's the light?"

"We don't dare show a light," said the first voice. "That beast wouldn't know whether we were a friend or foe, and what's more, he wouldn't care."

That was when I broke my long silence with an ugly hissing question.

*"Whicccch are you?"*

I felt the jerk of the rope as it scraped past an injured spot on my body and instantly pulled away from me. The two men must have had close contact with their guides high overhead. Whatever their signal system, they swung back from me before I could dart forward with my head. They swung back and up, without stopping for a word of argument.

"What's the hurry?" I hissed.

One of them answered, "Who are you?"

I didn't know. The girl had called me Bob, and the name had begun to ring pleasantly. I had caught the impression that it was all right to be Bob, as far as she was concerned, but that it might not be so good to be anyone else. I wondered.

"Bring me some food," I called.

"Who *are* you?" the voice returned.

"How do *I* know?" I said. "I'm too hungry to know anything."

There was a short whispered consultation. Should they flash the light on or shouldn't they? Would the monster snap at them or would he give them a chance? The wisps of conversation were reassuring, and I began to know that these two *meant* to be friends, if I would give them a chance.

"Are you *Bob?"* one of them asked presently.

"Who is *Bob?"* I asked.

THEY put their heads together again. If I didn't know who Bob was, maybe I wasn't one of the party they were seeking after all. Maybe I hadn't come to the space island recently—maybe I was an old-timer here who had simply kept myself well hidden until yesterday when I had been lured to the surface by the sight of that two-headed cat-monster.

It was all a mystery to me, but I wasn't going to turn away any advantage or miss a chance to eat.

"Pull me up to the surface," I said, "so I can find my dinner." I put considerable hiss in my voice as I added, "Otherwise I'll have to eat what I find down here."

"Meaning what?" one of the voices asked sharply.

"Meaning you. Hssssssh. *You."*

The rustle from the swing was the sound of two men making ready for trouble with ray pistols.

"All right, fellow," one of them said. "Crawl up this way and twine yourself around the rope. We'll take you up to the surface. No false moves, though, or you'll never eat another dinner."

I obeyed. My long body swished quietly upward between the walls and I crossed over to the rope. A moon slipped into sight, high above, and the two men below me must have had a fair view of me as I corkscrewed upward. My sore belly was put to a cruel test,


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

trying to hold a grip on a rope no bigger around than your arm, but presently I was on and I gave them the signal to take me up easy. Up we went.

A few minutes later I slithered over the edge of the crevasse once more, and mentally I vowed I would never seek those lower regions again. I was beginning to have some purposes of my own.

There was first of all that big purpose, and all the way up through the dark walls I had tried my best to recall what it was. Someone I must find? That was getting close, I thought.

Someone to find—the only someone I knew up here was the beautiful girl in the pool. Well, there was the one purpose that I could swear to. I wanted to know whether she was still there, and who she was, and where I had known her before.

"Bob," she had called me. If any words ever echoed in a snake's ears, hers were the words. If any serpent ever felt obliged to go back to a beautiful woman and find out why she had dared to trust him as far as that girl had trusted me, I was that serpent.

And so, out of these purposes, half defined, and half foggy, I acted with the slyness of a snake.

I could see the outline of a small plane on the ground. In the light of the various moons, I could see that its door was open. Did I dare?

The rope was still rising, being wound upward into a blimp that hovered darkly over the crevasse. The men had just reached the top. Now they would expect to take me in charge, using their pistols to command me.

"This way, you. If you want that dinner—"

I didn't listen. Something from my half forgotten memories told me that I knew how to handle a plane, and the door was open. It was a perfect set-up if I could crawl in before the guns started heading me off with red fire.

Swisssssh. Zippp! I shot along over the cool grass and I ploughed right into the plane's entrance.

There, so far so good. I pushed my nose against a lever that locked me in. The men were coming, all right. The lines of red fire were *zeego* shots, the same as the pygmies had used. But they were outside and I was safe within, crawling across the floor to the controls.

Could I, with my serpent's nose, my teeth, my hammer-like head, my agile neck—could I get away with it? In another moment I would know.

If it worked, then I would have the freedom to see what this strange land was all about. And first of all I would find that girl, if they hadn't taken her already.

*The controls were locked!*

Not a thing responded to my touch. Not a switch—

But suddenly, as I was trying one gadget after another, the lights went on—surely not from anything I had done!

"There," came a voice through the speaker, "I guess we're ready to take him with us." Those were voices from the blimp, coming in on the intercom.

"Is he in?" another voice said.

"He crawled right in without any coaxing," said one of the voices that had come up from the depths with me. "That's enough to prove that he *is* Bob. Look, he's at the controls now. He's our missing pilot, all right. That's another victory, boys. We're getting the party assembled gradually."

*So I was Bob, a pilot.* All right, if they said so, I'd be agreeable. But I was also a hungry serpent. I wasn't a cooperative animal. I was sly and vicious, and all I wanted was to look out for myself. If they thought they were


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

going to fly me somewhere as a prisoner, they had another think coming. I coiled around and crawled back to the door and nosed against the lever.

It wouldn't open.

The plane was moving through the blackness. Yes, it was rising. They were flying it by remote control, and I was on my way *somewhere,* whether I liked it or not.

## CHAPTER VI

NO DOUBT about it, they had set a neat trap for me. And here I was thinking that I was the sly one. They may have had the advantage of human looks, but I'm darned if they hadn't out-serpented the serpent.

We went toward the pink dawn and landed in the early morning twilight on a shelf of concrete in the upper level of a valley between two huge shoulders of mountain. Here was the stronghold from which I had seen the planes come, not so many hours ago, after the blow-up of a falling space ship.

My plane landed and came to a stop in front of a magnificent arched entrance. The other planes and the blimp closed in around me, and a ground crew of blue-and-orange men came out to take over.

The door of my plane was not opened until a glass-and-metal cage was set up for me.

I crawled in without any undue coaxing. Their trickery was still working. They had put a pygmy in the far corner of the cage. I *thought* it was a pygmy. But when my jaws clamped over it I found that it was a wax imitation. I spat it out and recoiled to strike back at someone, I didn't care whom. However, the door of my cage had already slid shut and I was caught.

If I had been an honored ambassador from the earth, extending good will and a promise of interplanetary trade to this planet, I'm sure my hosts would have found it in their power to feed me without any undue delay. And I would have eaten, and a friendship would have been sealed then and there, by virtue of the universal law of brotherhood that springs from a full stomach.

But I was a serpent in a cage, and neither my human voice nor the growlings of my lank intestines could prod my caretakers to move any faster than they wished to do.

"Is he ready for the experiment?" I heard someone ask.

"Better take him back into the Z Lab," came the answer.

Not bad looking scientists, I thought to myself. Plump and well-fed and sufficiently healthy to keep a hungry serpent nourished for a week. What other attributes these men may have had didn't interest me much at the time. I had caught a fleeting glimpse of the arched doorway, a noble structure ornamented with polished brass, large enough for planes to enter. Of the three openings under the arch, I was taken through the one that served the automotive traffic. Two trucks spun past me on their way out to one of the mountain highways, and I saw that they were driven *by pygmies!*

"This isn't going to be so pleasant," I told myself. "Now how many of those fellows will I have to account for when they bring me up before the judge?"

I was counting back over my indiscretions, shall we say, when the tunneled driveway opened into a lighted room. They wheeled me past a row of elevators, on through a lobby of automotive vehicles, and at last through a door of three square green-metal panels marked *Laboratory Z.*

The room would have been perfectly dark if someone hadn't been meddling



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with a lightning machine. As soon as the Lab door closed behind me, the lightning had me. I mean, it would have captured anyone's attention the first time. Dark-dark-dark-*flash!* Dark-dark-dark-*flash!*

After the first fifteen purplish-white flashes you began to think you'd caught the rhythm and could tell when the next flash was coming. But that was an illusion. *Flash-flash-flash!* All at once they were coming fast, and you had a premonition that they were going to close in on you and electrocute you. You couldn't tell exactly where they were coming from. But all at once you saw the door of your cage fly open, and no one was standing there with guns, so it was your chance.

I flashed around and darted out through the opening. My flying tail struck the rear wall as I turned, only to add a hard push to my sudden effort to slither out while there was a chance.

Wouldn't I ever learn?

It was nothing more than a trick, of course.

I REALIZED it the moment the last of my forty-foot body found the cool concrete floor. The very next flash showed a derrick-like arm swinging down from the ceiling. One glimpse—the resemblance was unmistakable—it was a package of sulphur-colored powders, the same as those that had descended on the girl in the pool.

Floooof!

On the instant the blackness of the room gave way to what seemed a luminous dust storm. My serpent-like form writhed and whipped and scraped and fought. The deluge was over me. I coughed and choked with wild unspeakable tortures.

It was over. The air was clearing, and the steam that had stung deep in my lungs was melting away. Bars of lights came on around the room, and the first thing I saw was my own form in a huge mirror.

I moved, half crawling and half *walking,* toward the mirror.

If you can imagine the classical facade of an old fashioned colonial home, with two pairs of fifty-foot columns standing white and solid on either side of the entrance, that's the sort of frame I now approached. It was the highest mirror I ever saw. A full sized giraffe could have used it to advantage and still had room to spare.

I move up the six wide concrete steps with considerable pride in my bearing. You see, I was watching myself in that mirror, fully aware that something had transformed me. *I had two arms once more, and also a good pair of human legs.*

The arms, somewhat to my dismay, were about six feet long—long enough that I had at once begun to use them for front legs. My snake-like body was still all there, from my scaled face and sly greenish-yellow eyes all the way down to my brightly colored tail. But I had legs! I was walking as well as crawling.

"How do you like it?"

The voice came out of a speaker in the wall.

"How did you do it?" I replied. I looked around to see who was conversing with me, and I spied them—three men in a plexiglass pill-box on the opposite wall.

"Come over this way so we can see you," one of the men said. "Do you remember who you are?"

"Of course," I said. "I'm Bob Garrison, a registered space ship pilot. I came to this space island on an errand—"

I checked myself. After all, it was none of their concern, so far as I knew. Just now I was whirling with more


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thoughts than I could hold, but it wouldn't do to spill any of the confidential ones. I was not too sure, after all, that I was among friends.

"I'm Bob Garrison," I repeated.

"Walk around the room, Bob Garrison," came the order.

I didn't mind obeying. It paid to know what one's body would and would not do, and if this was it—well, I needed a bit of exercise to get my balance.

All at once the hunger pangs shot through me, and I stopped, immediately below the platform where the three men were perched and looked up at them. Then the dreadful fact of my pygmy dinners came back with a new surge of remorseful conscience. That was awful. It was hideous. It was terrifying, and my serpent blood ran cold at the thought.

There I was, however, caught between the human impulse to recover my civilized feelings and my bestial instincts to leap up at the platform and devour one of those men.

I LEAPED. I leaped and struck at the plexiglass enclosure, and almost hit it.

"Good action," one of the men mumbled through the speaker. "I can't recall that we've ever had such a specimen as that before."

"I don't understand," another scientist replied, "why he shouldn't have transformed more completely into his original stage. He seems to have regained the human memory, all right. And we're not going to have any trouble bringing his arms back to normal. But he's taken a pretty deep shock, somehow, to have that serpent's body fixed upon him so stubbornly. How large a dose of powders did we apply?"

Their discussion went on along these lines. The girl, they mentioned, had come back to normal with only half as strong an explosion as they had given me. But someone protested that she had already been partially reconverted by means of a shock from *zeego* gunfire.

"Why don't we try the *zeego* fire on this one, then?"

That matter was worth a few minutes' earnest discussion, and two or three times I was sure they would decide to do it. (Once, not so many hours ago, I had captured three *zeego* guns of my own, I recalled, and had tried to find a pygmy to use them on, but in the end my appetite had always won over my scientific ambitions.) They eventually suspended their discussion. The boss had better be consulted before they did anything more to me.

"He's a pretty valuable specimen, just as he stands," said the chief spokesman. "We might ruin him with *zeego* fire. I have a hunch—"

He paused as if perhaps he should hold back his confidences, but the other two consultants were already guessing his thought.

"Yes, gentlemen, I have a hunch that Dr. Hunt will prefer to dissect this specimen as he now stands. An undamaged skeleton of this sort will give us one of the finest studies in the laboratory."

So that was it! I was to be Dr. Hunt's undamaged skeleton, was I? That was too much.

And to think that I was the man who had come to this ghastly outpost of space on a secret mission, if you please —*to rescue the lost scientist, Dr. Emerson Hunt.*

I leaped and struck the underside of the transparent enclosure so hard that the floor cracked, and a brace tore loose from its wall mooring. The three gentlemen must have decided to take their conference elsewhere. They made a quick exit and locked the wall door behind them.


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

## CHAPTER VII

I SHALL be everlastingly thankful to the caretaker who fed me before my visit with Flora Hessel. I was ravenous, and I simply couldn't have maintained any outward appearance of civilized serpenthood if they hadn't fed me.

The cage was around me again. I didn't mind that. It was just the protection I needed while I did some tall thinking. Flora Hessel, bless her heart, came to me and helped me think. With her help, it all seemed worthwhile.

"We were both warned against coming to this outpost in the first place," she said.

I nodded. I was thinking how beautiful a person she was, even dressed in one of the workmen's uniforms—a rough one-piece suit of blue and orange and a liberal sprinkling of grease spots. Her dark hair was loosely combed, falling free over one shoulder. Her bare legs and arms were lithe and graceful as she settled herself comfortably in the chair which a caretaker provided for her outside my cage.

"I remember what you said, Bob," she smiled, "when they warned you against coming. You said you had your own good reason for coming—something more than hiring out as their pilot, I was sure. But you never told me."

"No, I've never told anyone," I said cautiously. The fact was that I had been on the verge of telling her more than once during our long hours of flight together. But Ernest Marsch had done his very best to keep us from becoming acquainted. Ernest Marsch had hired each of us for our specialized jobs, and he had intended that we should keep our minds on our work.

"We have heard tales of these strange transformations before we came," Flora went on, looking dreamily off into space. "don't know about you, but I simply didn't believe they could happen."

"I didn't quite realize," I admitted. "Still, that was the very earliest report that ever came from this land—you know—after the first wave of settlers from the earth were shipped off Mars—"

It could be found in any modern history, even though each historian was careful to word his account in such a way that the story could be taken as a legend rather than fact. The first wave of American and English settlers on the earth colonies of Mars had gone through the bitter ordeal of becoming adjusted to new climatic and gravitational conditions, and the awful experience had taken its toll. Fifty years after the first wave of settlers, the second wave had come to Mars in great numbers. They came equipped with better means of setting up conditions congenial to their own needs, and they made a healthy go of it.

But the second group of Martian settlers simply couldn't endure the first! That was the original tragedy—and this was the fact that every writer of history deplored. The first group had become so changed and twisted in their human nature—shrunken in mind and body and spirit, and animal-like in their tastes—that in a sudden act of hysteria the second group had loaded up hundreds of the first group on derelict space ships and simply rocketed them *out of the solar system!*

Beyond the solar system, they had fallen to this mysterious space island, where the forces of gravitation had been found to be much like those of the earth. The drifting planet's inner heat provided conditions suitable for life, and there was life here—life in innumerable forms. Since much of the interplanetary driftwood, living and otherwise, from the solar system and three other systems, found its way to this particu-


CENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lar catchall in the sky, it was not surprising that there would be many forms of life here.

But, according to the fanciful legend which the historians handled with great caution, those varying forms of life were the results of *transformations* that occurred as soon as the creatures from other planets began to eat the food and drink the water which this space island provided.

And according to the legend, the first outcasts from the earth colony on Mars were still living here—not their descendants, but the original members of the first group. If this were true, they must be men and women more than two hundred years of age—or *were* they men and women?

Or were they *beasts* who roamed the mountains of Space Island?

THE historians could only cite the legend and promise that in time the scientists would have more answers.

But scientists were not too eager to come, considering the odds that a personal tragedy of some sort would strike them before they had a chance to set up a laboratory. As few persons on the earth realized, Dr. Hunt had come, but not of his own accord. There had been a bit of smooth interplanetary gangsterism back of his sudden disappearance from the well-known Emerson Laboratories.

All of this background came welling up into my thoughts while I talked with Flora Hessel from my glass and metal cage. The recent liberation from the awful serpent-thoughts gave me a flare of new hope that I might still be on the trail of my original purpose.

"I am going to confide in you," I said quietly, trying my best to keep the hiss out of my voice. "But first, you must tell me something. How did you know, when you first saw me as a serpent, that I might be Bob? Why didn't you guess me to be Ernest Marsch. Or Pete Hogan? Or one of the others?"

"Don't you know?"

"There were ten of us on board," I said, "and the explosion that struck us as we were coming in must have either killed or transformed all of us into something unrecognizable. I certainly didn't recognize you when you were in your cat-monster body. Not until you began to reduce into human form. And even then my mind was too bleary to remember who you were. I only knew that I felt friendly toward you."

"That was it," said Flora. "It was your manner—your friendliness and your courage. You remember you rushed after those little gunmen the minute they started shooting. Pete Hogan wouldn't have done that."

"But Ernest Marsch might have. After all, he's the one who employed you to come up here and tame some of his obstreperous workers. He wouldn't want to see you shot down after investing in you."

She smiled at the corners of her eyes. "You're right. If they'd killed me, *he'd* have shaken the gold out of my teeth to line his pocketbook."

"But you knew that I was Bob, not Ernest Marsch? Are you sure I'm *not* Marsch?"

"You were quite considerate of me while I was cornered in that cavern pool," she said. "For a snake, you used remarkably nice manners. Marsch wouldn't have been that decent even at his human best, you know."

I must admit that her words pleased me, and I felt that I was better acquainted with her than I had been at any time during the trip. Marsch had tried to drive a wedge between the two of us from the start. He had warned me that she was a dangerous person—


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that she had once come very nearly being a gangster's moll—that she had been mixed up in a gang war that had resulted in five killings one dark night on the west side. But I knew that whatever her past had been, she had later gained an enviable reputation in her social service work with the tough, homeless men on the west side. It was said that she could walk into a mob of quarreling, angry men and have them singing hymns within twenty minutes!

That was why Ernest Marsch had hired her for this job, as I had learned from their conversations on the ship. He was lining this planet up for some high-powered commercial venture, and he wanted the inhabitants—the *human* inhabitants—to be at least docile enough that they wouldn't obstruct the march of progress.

HER task wasn't going to be any snap, juding from what I had seen of those devilish pygmies. Moreover, if there were many freaks like me, half animal and half human, little Miss Hessel was going to have a big handful of trouble.

"Do they consider you a prisoner here?" I asked.

"I'm not sure," she looked wistfully at the window and the ridge of green mountains beyond. "They seem to think they're going to find Ernest Marsch somewhere, though it beats me how they can find any trace of lost persons in such a big empty world."

"And if they find Marsch—?"

"Well, I've told them I'm bound to work for him. I signed the contract and took out life insurance before I boarded."

"I wonder what *he* turned into."

"It's all theory," she said, "but one of the men was saying they believe a person' mood or humor at the time he struck the planet's explosive atmosphere is the thing that determines his change." Then she laughed. "No, it *can't* be that. You couldn't have been in the mood of a serpent."

"Are you sure?" I thought the matter over privately. I had certainly been spying on Ernest Marsch right up toward the moment of coming in on a landing, and I had been watching him as suspiciously as any snake. "But *you* couldn't have been a two-headed feline."

She was amused. "I don't know. When I try to remember that last moment before we exploded, all I can recall is that I was very curious—as curious as any cat, I'll bet—and I was trying to watch you and Ernest Marsch at the same time—trying not to displease either of you, though I felt sure that you were almost at swords' points—"

"Ye gods," I said. "This theory is getting stickier every minute. Maybe you *were* being a two-headed feline." Then, "If there's anything to it, they'll never find Marsch. It isn't easy to locate a worm, you know."

"It shouldn't be so hard to pick up a wolf," she said, giving me a quick look. "And I don't mean a harmless wolf either. If it hadn't been for your help on the trip, I think I might have forgot my good manners and shot Ernest Marsch through the heart."

"Really?"

"I didn't sign up to be his girl friend, you know. That little pistol of mine has been a friend in need more than once."

Then her edged voice softened and she looked at me sympathetically. "We'll have to get you out of this awful shape. They've made a good start, anyway, getting your brain back in order. But it's just a start. Are they going to find a way? Is that the confidence you wanted to give me?"


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"The confidence is this," I said. "I've just learned that this laboratory is the property of Dr. Hunt."

"Emerson Hunt? The one who was kidnapped from the earth?"

"I think so. I'm almost sure. It all points that way—these advanced experiments and all. You know what a reputation he had."

"And he's here—alive?"

"Yes. I'm on his trail."

"You mean—?"

"That that's my secret mission. I've come here to find him. Confidentially, an association of scientists has backed me in my plan to try to rescue him. You can realize how much it will mean to the earth—to the whole solar system—if he can be found and taken back."

"Oh!" Flora was gasping. "Oh, what a miracle that *would* be! It *would!* It would be a *miracle* for the whole world!"

"If not a miracle, at least a blessing."

"Of course!" She was rather too excited over the idea to know what she was saying, and I quieted her gently to make sure our conversation wouldn't be overheard by any of the guards. She was at once so enthusiastic that she was ready to break her contract with Marsch simply to help me. "No *wonder* you were always talking about some big purpose. How did you know he would be here?"

There was much that I couldn't tell her as yet. But the one fearful fact had to be told at once.

"Flora, listen to me carefully. I'm going to need all the help I can get, but we're going to be working against this whole weird world. I can tell that already—and you can too. Don't you see that they're thriving here in this strange scientific fortress on the genius of Dr. Hunt? Nobody here is going to let him get away if they can help it. Worst of all, I'm already doubting whether he'll *want* to get away."

"But *why?* If he has a sure chance to get back to the earth, *why*—"

"Because people change when they come to this land. Dr. Hunt has probably changed too."

"But if you talk to him—if you explain—"

I laughed rather mockingly at her extreme innocence. "Maybe *you* can talk to him, but not I."

"Why not?"

"Do you forget that I'm still a serpent? Not an ordinary serpent, but a serpent with four legs and a human mind. To a scientist with the advanced ideas of Dr. Hunt, I'll be something to be analyzed and observed, not listened to."

"Oh!"

"Eventually, they'll dissect me and see how I'm put together. I've already heard some of the consulting scientists mention that Dr. Hunt will be eager to get my skeleton for his permanent collection."

Six guards marched in, then, and our visit came to an end abruptly when they announced that Dr. Hunt was waiting to see me. Flora stood back of her chair, watching speechless as they wheeled me away in my cage.

## CHAPTER VIII

I HAVE had the common sensation of chills running down my spine many times in normal life, but I must say that I never knew any feeling like this before. When one's spine is fully forty feet long, and a series of chills chases through from head to tail, I'm telling you it's wild. Zing—zing—zing—before one chill gets well started, another's on the way.

There was far more to this mountain laboratory than I had guessed, at first sight. I hadn't realized that Z Lab



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

could mean just that—the last unit in a series named after the entire alphabet. But after we had moved past six or eight units, each bearing a different letter, I began to get a new appreciation of the extent of this place.

I was on my way to H laboratory. This had possibly become Dr. Hunt's favorite because it bore his initial.

H Laboratory opened to me automatically. The grilled metal doorway slid back into the wall, and a second door—a checkerboard of silver and gold—parted in the middle and folded backward in two wings.

"No talking, now," the guards warned me. I had almost forgotten that they were with me, I was so intent upon the details of all this laboratory grandeur.

"No talking," I repeated, rather insolently.

"And no undue crawling or twitching," one of the guards added.

"As if I had room to crawl in this cage," I replied.

"Quiet!" he snapped.

"I can't even twitch," I added. The serpent instinct was working on me. I was looking for ways to be annoying. "Can I breathe?"

"All right, breathe, but stop talking."

"Hisssss-hisssss!"

"Quiet."

"I'm just breathing," I said. "Can I help it if I've got a cold?"

The six guards stopped me in the middle of the doorway and put their heads together. Then I knew I had gone too far. The first thing I knew they'd start exploding more yellow powders over my head and I'd lose what little freedom I'd gained.

One of them stalked into a small supply room which we had just passed and returned, a moment later, bearing something that resembled a long-nosed oil can, but must have been some sort of high-powered hypodermic needle.

I was tempted to pull some fancy whip act and lash the fellow with my tail before he could give me the works. Something told me to take it easy—there might be worse things in store if I didn't at least *pretend* to cooperate. They gave me the shot.

The needle caught me about twelve feet from the tapered end of my body. One sharp ice-cold jab! All of those chills that had run down my long spine a few minutes before came chasing up again.

Chills and dizziness and then—ah! what a sensation of peace. I began to feel tame. Agreeable. Downright happy. All at once I wanted to be the nicest, kindliest serpent that ever went visiting in a laboratory.

"That ought to do it," one of the guards said.

I turned, touched the brow of my scaled face with my fingers and tried to smile.

"Thank you, gentlemen, I feel much better. What can I do to return the favor?"

"He's okay," the guards agreed, and proceeded to wheel me into Laboratory H.

I was pleasantly treated to the beauties and mysteries of the most impressive laboratory equipment I had ever seen. The huge glass tubes, standing in clusters above the tables, some of them twenty-five or thirty feet tall, were illuminated by a battery of colored lights, lavender, light green, purple, deep violet. Their gleaming stems were like frozen music. In one corner of the six-cornered room, a bright orange blur of motion indicated that a governor was spinning silently over a pyramid of shining machinery. One couldn't hear the churning of liquids in the scores of transparent containers which were built into the different levels of the mysteri-



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ous pyramid; but the orange blur cast its light over the whole series with each revolution. Again, a riot of colors hinted of a master-mind's secrets in blending the molecules of many elements. Who could know what new and rare combinations might come into existence through these experiments?

OUT of the dazzle I detected one detail which struck me as something not to be forgotten. That yellowish-white powder. At one side of the mixing pyramid I discovered it, sifting down slowly, like sand through an hour glass. Was this not the same sulphur-like substance that had been exploded over my head? And earlier, dumped over the pool where Flora Hessel was hiding?

If so, I thought, here was the source of these scientists' seeming magic.

The nice, kindly, agreeable feeling within me shuddered for just an instant. The serpent slyness was still there, under the surface. *If I could steal some of that powder, what might I do for myself? Was this my way back to my human state?*

"The doctor will be in right away," one of the white-uniformed men said. "Is our patient ready to be examined?"

"With pleasure," I said.

The white-uniformed man shot a quick, suspicious look at me.

"It's all right, Dr. Winston," a guard said. "We just gave him a shot of sixty-eight-J-sixty-nine."

Dr. Winston nodded. "Enough to put him to sleep?"

This wasn't so easily answered. Dr. Winston checked the slip which the guard showed him, and calculated mentally the quantity of the drug as compared with my probable blood content. They weren't too sure of their answers, for they hadn't had any specimen like me before.

"We'll see," Dr. Winston said, nodding again. Then he dismissed them, and I was left alone with him and this marvelous laboratory.

So they thought I would go to sleep, did they? Not if I could help it. Still, it was an idea.

I spoke drowsily, "Nice place you have here, friend." I opened my jaws slowly and yawned and let my eyes go half closed. "Nice place—ho-humm. Quiet . . . Restful."

He was watching me out of one corner of his eye. I seemed to be dropping off into a peaceful slumber.

He went to the telephone.

"Dr. Hunt? . . . The four-legged serpent is ready. . . . Obstreperous? Far from it. The attendants gave him a shot of sixty-eight-J-sixty-nine. He's sleeping."

I allowed my arms to fold on the floor of my cage, so that my head and neck sank to the level of my belly. It wasn't a very proud posture—and I must admit it wasn't easy to allow myself to slump into such a dejected-looking heap of flesh—especially in the presence of a fine, kingly looking person like Dr. Winston. He would have looked well in any convention of athletes—broad-shouldered, well-shaped hands, keen grey eyes, and a vigorous head of fine brown hair. He stood with excellent posture, with just enough swagger and toss to his head that it made you think his brain must weigh considerably more than the average man's.

I wondered whether Dr. Hunt could present as perfect an appearance. About all I had remembered of Hunt's picture was the striking black mustache and the sharp-pointed short black beard.

"Hissssss-hissssss-hissssss . . ."

My hissing breaths were barely audible. I was sure that I had convinced Dr. Winston. Now if Dr. Hunt would



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

just fall for my gag, I would have a chance to know what these men of knowledge meant to do with me.

Dr. Winston turned at the sound of a slight squeak-squeak-squeak from what might be considered the rear door of Laboratory H. It was the boss himself, rolling in in his luxurious chair.

Anyone would have known at a glance that here was the top man. Now that I saw him again, his pictures came back to me—that extremely potent magnetic quality that strikes out at you from some faces—he had it more than any person I had ever seen.

There was something about him that I couldn't quite clarify in my reptilian brain. I ignored the troubling thought and tried hard to watch him.

He rolled to a position within ten feet of my cage front, and I drank him in, mentally, through the half-slits of my sleeping eyes.

He hadn't looked up at me yet, I thought. The squeak of his chair annoyed me. He reached for the telephone that was a part of his rolling equipment, and barked an order to be relayed to some service department.

His physical peculiarity had struck me rather incidentally at first, but now I saw what it was. *He had four arms.*

He put down the phone at the same time he mopped the perspiration off his wide brow—at the same time he touched a chair control that moved him a little closer—at the same time his fourth and final hand was reaching into a pocket for another pair of eye-glasses.

The rolling chair had been so well designed to accommodate his four-armed body that one wasn't disturbed by the slightly spidery effect—as long as he was sitting.

WHEN he arose and began to walk around me I was more sensitive to his freakish profusion of appendages. It was all I could do to keep from opening my eyes wide. I was blinking, in spite of myself, but he and Dr. Winston were busy sizing up my length.

"We'll have to get some measurements, first thing, said Dr. Hunt. "I'd like to start dissecting as soon as possible."

"You mean within a few hours?" Winston asked. "It will take a few hours to sharpen the knives."

"You understand, of course, why I'm relying upon an early dissection."

Dr. Winston understood, and the two of them discussed it in just enough detail that I caught the drift. It was Dr. Hunt's hope that they might be able to produce more specimens like me. He believed that an early examination of the tissues of my body would show traces of the transformation from old to new. These would serve as guides for repeating the experiment.

They talked quietly.

That drugging they'd given me *was* making me sleepy, all right. But I held on. I wanted to know how soon they intended to start making pork chops of me——or should I say dragon chops?

The repair man came in just then, and they dropped their talk of me in favor of Dr. Hunt's rolling chair.

"Just an oiling job?" the repair man asked. "I'll have it back in five minutes."

Dr. Hunt pointed to the brown and blue checkered upholstery, demonstrating its worn places with his four hands. He said there should be a new upholstery job some time soon.

The repair man rolled the chair out the front entrance, and the two doctors returned to me.

"His eyes flickered," said Dr. Winston. "I believe he's awake."

"They tell me he talks," said Dr. Hunt. "Let's have a few words out of him."



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Winston turned to me. "Say something."

*"Hisssssss!"* I said.

"Come, come. You can do better than that."

*"Hisss. Hisss. Why should I talk if you're going to pick my bones clean and turn me into a laboratory skeleton?"*

All four of Dr. Hunt's elbows bumped backward and his sharp little beard jumped to an impertinent angle.

"I thought you said that they gave him a shot of sixty-eight-J-sixty-nine."

"They did," said Dr. Winston. "He was highly agreeable a few minutes ago."

"I'm highly agreeable *now*," I said casually, rising to a more comfortable position, and straightening my front legs beneath my scaled shoulders. "If you want to start cutting me up right away, I'll help you *sharpen the knives.*"

"Oh, you will. You *are* being agreeable, aren't you," said Dr. Hunt.

"These front legs of mine are pretty handy," I went on. "I've a good pair of hands on them, as you can see. So I'll help you dissect. *I* can begin cutting off cross-sections of my tail, if you like—"

"The drug's gone to his head," said Winston. "We'd better give him something else."

Dr. Hunt was eyeing me closely, not saying a word. I knew that my "cutting" remarks had disturbed him. I had gotten under his skin.

"Why don't you boys get *smart?*" I said, following up my advantage.

"Meaning what?" said Winston.

"Meaning that you're limping along with *old-fashioned methods* in this broken-down lab." I said it with all the conviction I could muster, and it was driving home. Dr. Hunt's twenty fingers began to twitch uneasily. I went on digging. "This broken-down lab might be good enough for Space Island, but it wouldn't be a good give-away back on the earth, unless you could find some scientist who is a sucker for antiques."

Dr. Hunt reddened a trifle, and his two right hands stroked through his ruffled black hair.

"What equipment do they have on the earth," he asked bluntly, "that excels my best?"

"They have a multiple X-ray attached to a plastic machine, so that they could turn out a perfect copy of my skeleton, in plastic, without ever touching a knife blade to my skin."

The two doctors exchanged glances.

"The drug has gone to his head," Winston repeated. "I'll get something stronger."

## CHAPTER IX

I'LL never know whether their sixty-eight-J-sixty-nine accounted for my actions, two minutes later, when the *zeego* guns began to flash all over the place.

They say that some men will rise to the greatest heights of bravery, or congeniality, or oratory under the influence of certain beverages, and afterward they'll wonder whether the achievement was their own or whether it came out of the bottle. That's how it was with me, two minutes later when the surprise attack struck Laboratory H.

It was those damned pygmies! Whoever they were, and wherever they had come from, they were suddenly raiding the place with *zeego* guns!

*Flash-flash-flash-flash ! ! ! !*

Red fire blasted through the dark corridor, quick sharp lines of it—back and forth and across. Three bars of it cut through the double doors of Lab H.

Dr. Winston dropped and I thought he had been hit.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dr. Hunt spun around, obviously looking for his rolling chair, but it was gone. He strode swiftly across to the nearest laboratory table and seized a telephone. Before he could speak, five of those two-and-a-half foot demons were racing in with their guns blazing.

One of them guarded the door, two of them marched to Dr. Winston, crouched on the floor holding his arm as if he had been wounded. The other two were running toward Dr. Hunt.

They didn't appear to notice me, probably because I was just a specimen in a cage, lying there inert without showing any signs of knowing what was going on. That's what *they* thought!

I swung my arm down through an opening between bars and smacked my hand against the floor. My cage, resting on rollers, lunged forward. Another touch of my hand sent me coasting into the path of the two pygmies who were going for Dr. Hunt.

They were moving fast, but so was I.

The red fire splashed over the glass sides of my prison. I caught a bit of the spray in my back. It struck with the sharpness of a hundred needles. My coiled body snapped like a spring, and my shoulder crashed into the bars. I drew back, saw the opening I had made, and plunged through.

"Look out! The monster! *Look out!*" one pygmy squealed.

*"Monster, huh?"* I snarled back as if that word had been just one insult too many. I didn't heed their gunfire, though it was needling through my scaled protection. I dived for the two of them with both arms swinging. I must have struck with pretty fair force. One of them sailed clear across the room and crashed into a stack of glass tubes, while his gun flipped into the air like something out of a catapult. The second little fellow simply dropped his weapon and went backing away, holding his hands behind him to keep them from being snapped off.

I pivoted from one arm, then, and whirled my forty-foot length like a whip. That knocked down three of them. A bit of carelessness on my part, I'm afraid, in the final flash of my tail. Dr. Winston had just come to his feet, and I caught him, too. So that everyone was on the floor except Dr. Hunt and the pygmy who had stayed to guard the door. I went for the guard. The pygmy at the door, I mean. He went for the corridor.

The first part of the pygmy attack ended then and there, as far as I was concerned. For Dr. Hunt had touched a switch, and the inner door of Laboratory H closed.

Clang! That was the outer door.

So there were seven of us, all locked in securely—and for a moment it was a toss-up as to who would be masters and who would be prisoners. Four pygmies—their brown little bodies adorned with nothing but red loin cloths; two doctors—probably the smartest on all of Space Island; and one serpent—a four-legged monstrosity powerful enough to burst out of his cage—and he was out.

I was out, and it seemed to me that I could have scooped all of the other persons in that room into my clutches then and there, and made them submit to my will—or choked them.

I say, it seems to me that I *could* have.

But it wouldn't have worked, and I should have known better than to think that one could defeat a scientist in his own laboratory.

I DID go so far as to gather up three of the four attackers and start toward Dr. Hunt with them—and you may wonder why, when Dr. Hunt was planning to strip the flesh from my


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bones, that I should trouble myself to play the hero in his defense. But you must remember that there was still a certain plan and purpose boring through my mind. I still had the dim hope that I might somehow lift Dr. Hunt out of this weird world and take him back to the earth.

A pretty fancy ambition for a four-legged serpent, you think? All right, I'll admit that I had hitched to a pretty high star. But I wasn't ready to let go.

Dr. Hunt must have flashed the lights off. I stopped in my tracks. The place was utterly dark—no, not quite *that* dark, after all. As soon as my eyes adjusted, I could see the single flooding light—dim, purple light that was almost like a shower bath of luminous purple dust. It was coming down over me, lighting my long six-foot arms, and casting a baleful glow over the three pygmies I held.

I had stopped in my tracks, and now I knew *why* I had stopped. *The flood of purple light had stopped me.*

I couldn't move. I was paralyzed. I was frozen. And that ugly pygmy, over whose waist I had clamped my left hand, was quite as frozen as I. The other two, who I had caught by the feet and who hung upside down from my uplifted right arm, never twitched or flicked an eyebrow.

We were all frozen together by some diabolical paralysis ray. It was a trifle embarrassing. My serpent's jaws were open and my head was inclined toward the object in my left hand. Even in the dim purple light I knew that the two doctors would be able to see, plainly enough, what *might* have happened.

I won't say that it *would* have happened. I only say that the instant the room was plunged in darkness, I must have made a motion as if I were going to eat one of the pygmies—and that was how the paralysis had caught me.

"Are you all right, Dr. Winston?" Dr. Hunt called out.

"I'm here," said Dr. Winston. "That was quick action on your part, Dr. Hunt. You escaped injury, didn't you?"

"Were you knocked down, Dr. Winston? I saw you falling."

"The beast's tail caught me. Have you got the freeze on solid?"

"Solid," said Dr. Hunt. "Another minute and we can put the lights on. We'd better get a report on the rest of the units meanwhile. This attack may be widespread. I've been uneasy for days."

"The Mashas haven't a chance against us, don't worry," said Dr. Winston as stoutly as he could. "This little flare-up can't last. They tried before, you know."

"They've been trying for a century and a half," said Dr. Hunt. "I've studied the records of this planet, and I've found that troubles like these have recurred every ten or fifteen years."

Dr. Hunt got through to his various secretaries on the telephone. He talked fast, at first, until the reassurances calmed him. The attack had come and gone like a quick thundershower. He hung up, satisfied.

He turned on the lights and opened the laboratory doors, all the while reporting to Dr. Winston.

"They've captured fifteen of the troublemakers—none of them identified as our servants. There hasn't been any general uprising among our servants, I'm glad to say. That means that our serums are still working."

"Then the only trouble came from outsiders?" Winston asked.

"Apparently."

"If it had been our servants, they might have reason to make trouble, but



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I can't understand why those outside Mashas who have the whole countryside to live in, and who haven't been in any way enslaved, should take it in their heads to storm our fortress."

"I don't understand it, either," Dr. Hunt admitted slowly. He stroked his sharp black beard thoughtfully. "I wish we had some way of finding out."

They sauntered back in my direction, and then, as if with a single inspiration, they stopped and stared at me. They gazed at the three scared Mashas in my grasp.

"I wonder," Dr. Hunt said slowly.

"I was thinking the same thing," said Dr. Winston. "Maybe we *do* have a way of finding out—a decidedly ingenious way."

Dr. Hunt looked me over carefully, giving particular attention to my open jaws. The *Mashas* were doubly frozen —once from the ray and once from fear.

"I'd hate like sin to let one of the finest specimens we've ever created get away. But I'd risk a lot to know the Mashas from the inside. Yes, I think it might be worth a try," said Dr. Hunt.

## CHAPTER X

YOU never saw such tender care exercised upon a serpent. They fed me the most wonderful foods, and gave me the most comfortable bed I could ask for. They treated my wounds with a dozen kinds of salves and oils; they bathed and massaged me and manicured me; they took me out for exercise, allowing me to run along at my own pace, hitched to a ten-ton truck.

It was wonderful while it lasted. I was their favorite pet dog, you might say, and they considered it a privilege to walk me.

The only trouble with the exercise periods was that they always occurred at night, so that I didn't have much chance to study the countryside. That was their precaution. They didn't want the outside pygmies—that is, the Mashas—to know that they were grooming me for a special purpose.

Best of all, they gave me access to an indoor swimming pool where I could thrash around and whip the water to my tail's content.

"Is everything perfectly satisfactory?" the attendants would ask me. "Is the water the right temperature? You *don't* care for a towel, do you? If so, don't hesitate to put in your request."

"Ah—er—I think of just one thing," I said, recalling those first strange hours down in the stream in the bottom of the crevasse. "I have a weakness for blossom-scented air. Could you arrange to have some flowers brought in and placed beside the pool?"

When Flora Hessel came to visit me in my room, and I described all of these luxuries to her, she was not as surprised as I had expected.

"It's no more than you deserve," she said. "After all, you saved the lives of the two most important men in this kingdom."

"I did?"

"Oh, you needn't be so modest about it. Everyone has heard, by this time. That little band of Mashas was all set to take over this fortress from the inside. If they had captured Laboratory H, as they planned, they could have given orders from Dr. Hunt's phones, and that would have done it. There'd have been a thousand Mashas pouring in from all directions before the trick was known."

I studied over that set-up, shaking by head slowly.

"Now I'm not trying to argue for the sake of argument," I said, "and if these rumors are making the rounds, I sup-



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pose there must be some basis for them. But tell me this: how could any pygmy —or Masha, I mean—imitate Dr. Hunt over the phone?"

"People do imitate people, you know."

"But a pygmy imitating Dr. Hunt—that would be like a mouse imitating a lion. Have you heard Dr. Hunt's big solid voice? It's deep, it's throaty, it's full of chesty thunder. Have you heard any of these pygmy servants speak? . . . All right."

Flora came back to her original point that anyway I had saved a couple of lives—important ones, too. So I swelled up my snakely chest with pride. She didn't notice. She was looking out the window at the green ridge of mountains, thinking her private thoughts, and I guessed that my argument about the voices had disturbed her.

"You know," she said presently, "I think you've got an angle. Maybe those pygmies weren't going to use a *pygmy* to imitate Dr. Hunt. Maybe they were going to use someone here at the fortress—one of the guards—one of the doctors—one of Dr. Hunt's secretaries."

"M-m-m." I didn't say it with much conviction. Nevertheless it was a tantalizing thought.

"Maybe this Winston you told me about was all set to step into Dr. Hunt's shoes, using the little people as his army," Flora went on, now looking farther away than ever.

"No, no, it couldn't be that." Refusing to give it a thought, I changed the subject. "It's like Dr. Hunt says, all you have to do is consult the record to see that the Mashas have been bursting out with an attack every ten or fifteen years."

It was natural enough for them to try to regain their lost power, we agreed. The Mashas were the original outcasts from Mars. Their original name, Martians, had degenerated into the word Mashas. Their physical characteristics had been warped and changed from the original man-like stature to the small, wiry, shrunken bodies they now possessed. That was what their first forty or fifty years away from the earth had done for them. Mars had "marshed" them, as the phrase had originally given it; or later, it was said to have "mashed" them.

THE later generations of Martian settlers had first called them, accordingly, not Martians, but Mashas. And it was the new settlers who had more or less brutally exiled them.

Here they were, still alive and still rankling from the mistreatment a hundred and fifty years later.

"One can't help feeling sorry over their plight," Flora said philosophically. "It's all a trick of fate."

"It's been done, and it can't be undone," I said. "For all we know, they may live on another couple centuries —or hell, they may make trouble for a thousand years, who knows. This freakish planet might refuse to let them die."

"Well, they *can* die, you know," said Flora, giving me a quick eye. "You've already accounted for a few of them."

I nodded, a bit shamefaced. Then I told her what had happened at the end of my rescue, when the attack had been made on Laboratory H. I described in all its gory details the statue of the three pygmies caught under my open jaws when the purple paralysis ray shot down on us from the ceiling and froze us in action.

"That little party proved two things to the doctors, as plain as day," I said. "One, my tough scales can withstand a certain amount of *zeego* fire. Two, my



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tough stomach is good for at least a limited quantity of pygmy steak."

"I could have told them that," said Flora.

"Well, there you have it. That's the reason they're treating me to all these luxuries."

"You mean it isn't because you're a hero?"

"Heroes get banquets and medals and speeches. That's because their work is already done. But these boys are grooming me for a *new job*—a big job that's never been done before. They're virtually bribing me to do it well." I told her about it.

"H-m-m-m." Flora Hessel was more than a little disturbed. "Just where does this get you in relation to your own purpose? When you get through exploring the inside of the Masha world as a favor to Dr. Hunt, is he going to pack up and go back to the earth as a favor to you?"

I couldn't answer that in the affirmative and be truthful. And in Flora's presence I didn't feel like being a snake. So I didn't answer.

She walked to the door, and just before she walked away she gave her own answer.

"The first chance you get," she said, "take a walk down the spiral passage beyond Laboratory X and you'll come to the museum of Dr. Hunt's skeletons. You'll find your answer there."

She seemed to be saying, "Walk into the trap, you stupid fool," though she hadn't actually said so.

But there was one thing she had said that deserved a little more explanation, and I called to her sharply.

"Just a minute, there, High-and-Mighty," I said. "How did *you* happen to find your way down into the museum of skeletons? I thought you were a prisoner here. Or are you a first-class tourist? Or are you asking for a job, feeding the skeletons?"

She tossed her dark hair over her shoulders and flashed her dark eyes at me. "I guess it wouldn't make any difference to you if I *did* tell you."

"I've got tough scales. I think I can take it," said.

"All right, you asked for it. I went down there because I had a date with a charming wolf in sheep's clothing."

## CHAPTER XI

I MUST have been pretty desperate to take the chance I took the very next night. I *was* desperate. I was boiling with an inner rage that was born not of fear but of jealousy.

"Take me *that* way," I said to the attendant who was examining the hitch at the end of the truck. "Take me back into the mountain trail that curves over the buildings."

The attendant shrugged as if it made no difference to him, so long as I got my exercise. He went up front and crawled in beside the driver. Neither he nor the driver guessed what was in my mind. They were finding me a cooperative pet who could be led to water, and that was all they cared.

I couldn't help wondering whether a pygmy driver would have been as unconcerned. But the authorities had their eye on that item, too. They knew that there might be a leak of information from this mountainside colony to the outside Mashas, and if so, that leak was probably one of the trusted little Masha slaves who, in spite of the doctor's regular doses of serum, contained enough spark to know what was going on.

The pygmy servants were all being watched these days, for this reason. If someone on the inside should be found guilty of helping with the recent at-


CENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tack, he would no doubt be treated to something pretty severe. More serum, perhaps? Well, you never knew. These scientists were playing a bold game, and they would just as soon try grafting an elephant's head on a two-and-a-half-foot Masha if they thought it would work.

There were a great many things along that line that continually disturbed my thoughts and stole my sleep, and I couldn't help wishing that I could get Dr. Hunt under some special secret-revealing ray long enough to make him expose a few facts.

But this much was beginning to take root in my mind. The Mashas were tougher than the newcomers to this region. Their training period in Mars a century and a half ago had stiffened their resistance to the capricious forces of this planet which turned all manner of men into all manner of freaks. The Mashas had apparently already been cooked to a turn, so to speak, exactly to old Mother Nature's taste. And so they lived on, almost unchanging from year to year.

And still, the serums were able to effect *temporary* differences in their week-to-week behavior. As long as they were well doped, they made excellent slaves—dull, obedient, dependable and, as a rule, non-vicious.

But on the other hand, the men of the earth and other solar planets where earth's space ships had established new branches of earth's peoples—these persons who had come more recently to Space Island—were arriving, in many cases, transformed.

Why? By what agencies? Well, let these brilliant scientists from Dr. Hunt's great laboratories answer such questions if they were able. For my part, I stood as a living proof that such things *did* happen. I had seen the *re*-transformation take place completely in the case of Flora Hessel—partially, in my own case. And there were other evidences . . . .

What of Dr. Hunt's arms? I wondered.

Had this been a trick of accidental transformation? Or *controlled* transformation?

This I knew: he *wanted* those four arms. He had use for all of them, and they did much to increase his efficiency. *If* he had wanted a completely normal body, wouldn't he have applied the yellow powders? Or would that have been taking too great a risk?

What would have happened to him if the *zeego* guns had struck those arms? Would the very shock have acted for a quick change in nature's delicate arrangement of his parts?

It was no wonder that I, the serpent victim of all this ungodly freak factory, was losing sleep trying to understand. There must be some underlying principles, I thought. The very essence of science dwells in principles or laws or some sort of generalizations that can be relied upon. Things happen because a given set of forces *always* makes such things happen.

And yet here I was, the only human serpent—the only four-legged serpent with human hands and a human brain!

In all of Space Island there was not another like me, they believed.

BUT there were *men*—ever so many normal men—like Dr. Winston and the attendants and guards. And there were a few women, at least. Had all of them come through some violent transformation, the same as Flora Hessel?

Ah, *there* was a girl. And as I now ran along beside the truck that was taking me out for exercise, this was at once the most hopeful and the most disturbing thought of all. *Flora!*


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Who was I, a serpent, to try to bring scientific order out of this weird world of confusion? All I really knew, in the final analysis, were the obvious things. I knew Flora—yes.

I knew that there wasn't another person on this planet who was so much a friend to me as Flora Hessel. Of all the brilliant persons who had observed me and questioned me and cared for me, she was the only one who had said, *"You must get out of this form. You must get yourself back to your normal state."*

And then I came back to the feverish, jealous thoughts that had caused me to ask the attendant to take me over this particular trail.

Jealousy? Or was it something less definite? *Suspicion*—that was it.

Flora had had a date with a *charming wolf in sheep's clothing*, she had said.

That could mean only one thing, I thought. Ernest Marsch. He was still alive, he was somewhere in the immediate vicinity, and he had seen Flora.

I didn't like it. I remembered what she had said about relying upon my protection during our space hop. Otherwise, she had said, she might have resorted to the use of her pistol.

Did she have a pistol now?

How had he found her? Where had they met? Why had she agreed to go with him through the spiral tunnel beyond Laboratory X to explore a museum full of bones?

Before this night's exercise was over I meant to find some of the answers for myself. I had only the vaguest idea, I must admit, as to how much exercise would be required before I got to the bottom of things.

The truck had swung around the wide plaza and taken a cloverleaf turn to ascend the mountain road. We were moving at approximately ten miles an hour, I guessed.

I was using my legs to much greater advantage than ever before. You know how it is with a child who has spent several months crawling and suddenly discovers it can walk. I was not only walking, I was running.

The rope which they had fastened to the harness around my neck and shoulders was long enough that I could run up alongside the cab to check on my speed.

"How fast?" I asked.

The attendant and the driver both gave a nervous lurch whenever they discovered me moving along beside their window.

"Eight miles an hour," said the attendant. "Take it easy. You're not supposed to overwork."

"I feel like going faster," I said. I stepped up my speed and would have run along in front of them if they hadn't stepped on the accelerator.

I don't think they liked the sight of me, moving along in their lights. After all, I must have looked to them like the world's biggest, snakiest lizard, galloping along on a leash.

They moved past me, and I caught up again.

"Step on it," I said. "I feel the need of exercise."

They doubled their pace, and I stayed with them.

In a moment the attendant called out to me, "We're up to thirty-two miles an hour. That's fast enough. They'll give me hell if I let you run your legs off."

"It's a perfectly comfortable speed," I said. "But I'm in the mood to race."

"Oh, so that's it." The attendant growled something to the driver. They figured they'd take it out of me in another five minutes.

I KEPT an eye on the trail as we accelerated again. I was kicking up


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

my share of dust, now, at forty-five miles an hour, and every now and then my tail would whip down against the road, and that, you may believe, was unintentional. It was a beginner's awkwardness, you might say. No snake spanks himself on purpose.

I was watching the trail, and here came the curving mile I had been waiting for. It was a good piece of road, except that it was so full of twists and turns you might think it would put a permanent wave in a serpent's backbone. Just below the edge of the road the ledge dropped straight down about sixty feet—to the roofs of the fortress.

In other words, we had gained enough elevation to switch back over the laboratories.

I bounded up beside the cab and shouted, "Faster!"

The driver moved the speedometer up to sixty-five miles an hour. "How's that?" he yelled.

"Just right," I said, falling back gradually. "Hold it right there for ten minutes."

"Can you take it?"

"If I can't, I'll shout."

Then I fell back gradually. The driver and the attendant kept their spotlight on the curves ahead and let me shift for myself. That was just what I wanted.

Snap! Ever since we had started, I had been biting at the rope that was fastened to my harness. With one savage bite I finished the job. I was free.

The truck whirled on around the bend, dragging the rope behind it.

I bounded down over the embankment, clinging tight with all of my crawling muscles.

Four or five minutes later, when the sounds of the truck's brakes reached my ears, I was already slithering over the glass and metal roofs of the laboratories. I was in the mood to be free, for a change, and it would take more than six moons and a truck's spotlight to find me among these roofs.

## CHAPTER XII

I RESTED for a full hour, lying in a perfect hiding place a few feet from a chimney and a ventilator. I could imagine what the driver and the attendant were saying as they played their spotlight over the rocks, up and down the mountainside and out across the roofs, looking for me. They had better practice their story well before they went back empty handed, I thought, if they were going to make it stick.

I could just hear them trying to pass the buck. "I *told* the driver we shouldn't race him faster than fifteen miles an hour." Or— "How the hell did *I* know? I'm just the driver, and if the damned snake wanted exercise, it made no difference to me, as long as the attendant didn't kick."

But the alibis wouldn't be enough, I was sure: not unless someone could produce the serpent. The crusty old Captain of the Guards would be pretty sure to get the job of running me down. And I knew that he would be the guy who could make a thorough job of it. So I had better make hay before they got the squads on my trail.

As soon as those flashes of light ceased to glide over the roofs, I took a long chance and crawled quietly to the nearest dimly lighted section of glass roof.

"A greenhouse," I said to myself. "Now where would the laboratories be from here?"

I lumbered along at a good pace over the metal surfaces. They were still warm from the day's sun, and their rust and grime and rock dust didn't make for comfortable crawling. Over



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the glass roofs I took extra care, for once I struck a loose pane and it fell through with a crash. Another light came on, down in that section of greenhouse, and a pygmy gardener came in with a sprinkler in his hand, looking around to see what was the matter.

I tried to hold my breath. When I let go with a quiet "Hssssh!" he looked up and saw my head through the aperture. He screeched bloody murder and rolled over his sprinkler in a faint. I didn't wait to see how soon he revived, but skimmed along to a safer realm.

At least, I hoped it would be a safer realm. But the direction I chose failed to offer the solitude I needed.

*Eight pygmies on the roof!* Now what were *they* doing there?

The most obvious answer was, they were playing with fire. I crawled up toward them silently and looked in on their party.

Down in a four-foot depression where the irregular roofs had been joined with a patchwork of corrugated metal, they had lighted a few torches and were heating a branding iron.

"Put your initials on him while you're at it," one of them said, adding a low, cackling laugh.

"Don't let him squeal and spoil the fun," came another Masha cackle.

One of the dark little creatures waved a restraining hand across the firelight. "Before we touch the iron, he might like to have one more chance. How about it, Kipper?"

It was seven against one. I crept a little closer to study the evil faces by the light of the torches. Eight little Mashas. Seven of them wore only the red loin cloths, the costume of the outsider.

The eighth wore, in addition to the red loin cloth, a green neckband which was the band of the servant, and an armband which denoted his particular rank and function. He was tied, and gagged, and as completely helpless as a mouse dying in a trap.

The leader of the seven outsiders swung the red-hot iron in a circle. "Anything to say, Kipper? Wouldn't you like to play on our side for a change?"

"Wug!" That was all he could say, choked by a cloth gag.

"Touch him up with the heat and he'll whistle out of his ears. Here, give *me* the iron—"

BUT the leader kept the party in his own hands. He recited a little speech which gave me the lowdown I needed to understand the situation. He said that *if* Kipper had been so completely drugged by the scientists' serums that he *couldn't* do anything but stupidly obey orders, it would be different.

"But we've put you to the test, Kipper, and we've found out that you're *not* one of their victims. You're playing their servant, all right, but you're also playing some game of your own. Now we're giving you your chance to come back to us."

Kipper's eyes were stubborn slits, and his wrinkled brown cheeks were as hard as steel, and there was a defiance in his little jaws that his seven torturers weren't going to break down.

"All right, Kipper."

The leader ran the point of the red-hot iron across his chest to burn a thin dark line. Kipper's elbows dug tight at his sides.

The leader withdrew the iron, so that for the moment its light showed the gleam of cruelty in his own round eyes. His large mouth sagged with a brutal expression. You could almost hear the clank of chains in his thin, taunting voice. This was Jallan, one of the plotters who had engineered the recent at-


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tack on the fortress.

"Now, Kipper," Jallan snatched the gag out of his mouth, "we give you your last chance. Are you willing to play our game, and help us into control? Are you willing? Or are you going to go on, another hundred years, being a lone wolf?"

"I was a lone wolf on Mars," said Kipper coldly. "I've never asked a damned thing of any of you except that you let me go my own way."

Jallan gave a flourish with the iron. He touched the point of it to the torches that burned together in a single red flame.

"Put the gag in his mouth, Padderman. Or should we let his scream make music for the whole valley of Mashas? That's it, gag him well. Now I'll give him something he'll carry with him for a thousand years."

"Brand him with an *L.W.*—for 'lone wolf,'" said Padderman, marking the letters in the air with his gnarled finger.

"I'll brand a hole right through his guts. Here goes!"

*"Hisssssss!"* I breathed audibly. Then forcibly. *"HISSSSSSSSS!"*

The second blast from my serpent lips upset the party and blew the fire out.

"Serpent!" someone cried. They all saw me, looming there above them. And that did it. Talk about bats out of hell. You never heard such a beating of feet over a tin roof. Clatter-clatter-spill-clang!! Clatter-clatter—over and away and off into the distant sounds of the night.

When the sounds of their disorganized retreat had died away, there was still the low hissing of my breath, and the sizzle of my spit on the red-hot branding iron. And there was still the muffled choking, gasping and coughing of Kipper as I drew the gag out of his mouth and unfastened the cords that bound him.

"Don't be afraid of me," I said, as gently as any serpent could be expected to speak under the circumstances. "I had a square meal earlier in the evening. I'll not be dangerous."

## CHAPTER XIII

IT WAS a strange friendship that grew out of that meeting. If I ever met a bold and hardy spirit, Kipper was it. The old term, Lone Wolf, had never meant much to me before. But here, believe me, was a man who filled the bill.

A *man*, did I say?

For the first time, I was thinking of a pygmy not in terms of the calories he would offer for my hungry stomach, but in terms of the staunch, stubborn, indomitable human will that characterizes a *man*.

Here was a two-and-a-half-foot human creature who had cut his own pattern of life for more than two centuries. The rigors of severe Martian winters, and the magic of that baffling climate, had taken a toll. He no longer possessed the proud five-foot-ten stature that had been his earthly possession. But shrunken and dwarfed and wrinkled and ancient, he was still a man who possessed his own will.

Before that night was an hour older, he was telling me, as confidentially as a brother, how he came and went through the halls of Dr. Hunt's scientific fortress.

"A servant? Yes, I'm a servant. I'm a servant because I want to be, not because the serums force me to be."

"But they do give you the serums?" I asked.

"As regularly as the setting of the sun. But I *resist* the effects. Don't ask me how. That's just me. I resist



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the effects of medicine the same as I resist the influences of my enemies. Sometimes I pay a price."

He touched the burn across his chest.

The squadron from the Captain's headquarters was at work by this time, moving along the mountain trail above the building's roofs, playing their searchlights in all directions. The scampering Mashas were probably getting a second scare, unless they had a very safe hiding place near the fortress.

"We'll be safer down in the laboratories," Kipper said. "Or do you dare go down? There's an open skylight over this way. It's my regular night exit when I need a breath of air—and incidentally, it's a favorite entrance for the Mashas who have designs on this realm."

"Lead the way, Kipper," I said.

Kipper led the way and I followed. For Kipper it was a well-worn trail. For me it was full of hazards—openings that were too small and glass walls that were too fragile. However, twenty minutes of twisting and turning and feeling our way through dark passages, brought us into a deep basement descent, dimly illuminated with blue wall-lights.

"This," said Kipper, "spirals down to the museum of skeletons. If you're not in a hurry—"

"Just a minute," I said. I didn't want this to lead to anything embarrassing, and I wasn't too sure of my grounds. It was a fact that I had originally wanted to find my way to this very spiral descent. That's where I had set out for, in taking my exercise tour over the roofs. Lab X had been my goal, with its spiral passage beyond, and eventually the museum. However —"I hope you'll pardon me if I meet a friend down here."

"That's *my* expectation," said Kipper. "I mean, I'm intending to meet a friend."

"Huh?" I was growing more uneasy. My errand of jealousy wouldn't thrive on too much congestion. "I'd better explain myself. I have a friend —Flora Hessel—and an enemy, Ernest Marsch. The less they see of each other, the better it suits me. But she told me very bluntly that she had had a date with him here recently. Do you follow?"

"Go on," said Kipper.

"I like the gal," I said. "Even though I'm now living a snakely existence, I hate to see her get mixed up with a hard-boiled wolf like Marsch. He isn't good for her, believe me. Do you follow?"

"You're jealous," said Kipper.

"I'm a green-eyed serpent. That's why I've come. If I find that he's lurking down in this lost region, I'm going to have the pleasure of snapping his head off before I report back to headquarters."

KIPPER had stopped, looking at me with a curious expression. He cupped his ear, and I thought I heard, too. Footsteps. That could be Flora Hessel, coming down our way. I wondered if I had said too much. He was beginning to smile at me strangely.

"I hope I'm not in danger," he said.

"Why should you be?"

"Didn't you say she had a date with a wolf?"

"Yes, but—"

"All right, I have a date with Flora Hessel," said Kipper. "I must be the wolf she referred to."

I blinked. Had I misjudged this keen-eyed, straight-shooting little fellow? "You—a wolf?"

"Didn't you hear them call me a Lone Wolf? They were going to brand me L.W."

"Oh—*Lone* Wolf — that's different.


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Did she mean *you?"*

By that time the footsteps had materialized into Flora herself. She gave a surprised gasp to see the two of us together.

"Oh, you know each other!" Flora exclaimed with a lift of delight in her voice. "Fine. I'm so glad. Isn't he charming, Bob? I told you he was a charming wolf in sheep's clothing, didn't I?"

Kipper cleared his throat. *"Lone* Wolf, if you please. You mixed your terms, Madam, and I think you'd better apologize before your misshapen friend gets the wrong impression."

"Oh, I'm sorry. Lone Wolf, of course. Anyway, Bob, he's perfectly delightful, and he's given me more information about the goings-on of this place than I'd get from the attendants in a hundred years. All these skeletons down here—"

She talked on, as glibly as a chattering magpie, while she and Kipper led me into the opening chamber of the museum of white bones. All of my jealous emotions were suddenly as dead as the specimen we were examining. If I failed to catch all the interesting facts they were giving me as they guided me through the place, it was because I was saying to myself, "What a silly serpent you were, Bob Garrison, to get all green-eyed about nothing at all. It was all your foolish imagination."

And yet I couldn't be too severe with myself, considering how things had turned out. If I hadn't started out to get the lowdown, I wouldn't have saved Kipper from an ugly ordeal.

As it was, I had two staunch friends, both of them wise and understanding. They were ready to help me through with my purpose of recovering Dr. Hunt from their weird world *if* it was humanly possible.

Or if it wasn't *humanly* possible, perhaps some *inhuman* talents from a serpent would be effective. At any rate I thought I was on the trail.

"But Flora," I protested, "I'm still in the dark about Ernest Marsch. Hasn't he popped up anywhere along the line to claim your services?"

She shook her pretty head. "I haven't seen him since we came into the planet's explosion zone," she said.

Kipper had stopped to listen at one of the museum phones.

"A bit of trouble back in the laboratories," he said. "They're all stirred up over their missing serpent."

"Do you think we should go back and report?" I asked.

"That would be safest," said Kipper. "Otherwise they may punish the driver and the attendant severely for losing you. Furthermore, they may send out a general announcement to shoot you on sight."

"We'll go back," I said. I took a quick look at the weird conglomeration of skeletal forms all around me, gleaming white and chalky in the blue light. There was one pedestal that had been placed recently, with no skeleton on it. Flora gave me a suspicious look, and we both guessed that it was being prepared for me. We hurried away without speaking of it. But I was filling up with unanswered questions, and one of these times I'd have to get Kipper in a corner and pump him.

"Worried?" Kipper asked blithely as we made our exit.

"It's nothing," I said. "Just a slight ache through my vertebrae."

## CHAPTER XIV

WITH Kipper's help, Flora returned to the elevation of general living quarters unnoticed. He assisted me in slipping into a corridor that


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

would lead to Lab H—Dr. Hunt's own stamping ground—from which I would be able to face my own situation with all possible advantages.

"You don't jump through walls, and they know it," Kipper advised me before he left, "so you'd better get some answers ready for them. But don't tell them too much. Remember, you're a snake."

"Hissss!" I said agreeably.

Kipper gave me a satisfied wink and went on his way.

I knew how to put a stop to all of the quandary over my disappearance the easiest way, I thought. I would go to the phone from which Dr. Hunt had made his general announcements and I would simply say, "Hissss! When do I get my ssssupper?"

I was crossing through the six-cornered room, moving carefully, for it was almost completely dark, and I didn't want to welcome myself back with a crash of any expensive glass tubes. I had got as far as Dr. Hunt's rolling chair in the middle of the room when I heard the sounds of low voices from somewhere in the vicinity of the nearest laboratory table. As a serpent, whose flesh and bones were of great interest to these scientists, I had every reason to be interested in low, whispery voices.

One of the voices was that of Dr. Winston.

"How much do you think the serpent knows?" Winston said quietly.

I could see Winston's tall, courtly figure silhouetted against the faint circle of light emanating from one of the instruments.

The voice which answered Winston was not familiar, but I knew at once that it was not Dr. Hunt's. It had a deep-cistern quality—a hollow echo, like a voice coming through a long, dark tunnel. And yet it was distinct, with sharp, crackling edges to the consonant sounds, like little crackles of thunder very close to your ear.

"He knows," said the deep-cistern voice, "that Dr. Hunt was forced to come here."

"Then he must know," said Dr. Winston, "that there *is* a power which holds Dr. Hunt in control."

"He has not seen me," said the deep-cistern.

"I thought," Winston said, "that you had succeeded in influencing Hunt to have him killed at once—for his skeleton."

"That was my intention," the voice rumbled. "But Dr. Hunt's own plan rose up in his mind just when I thought I had succeeded. Dr. Hunt has never yet been completely subordinated . . ."

I was getting an earful, all right. I tried to catch sight of the form that gave out with the deep-cistern tones, but I couldn't see anyone except Dr. Winston. I was taking an awful risk, being here this way, and I was getting nervous. My tail kept twitching.

What if they should turn on a light?

What a dilemma! Somewhere they were stewing about losing me. The driver and the attendant were probably getting a verbal roasting for their carelessness. I should go to Dr. Hunt at once to prove that I had come back unharmed.

But I couldn't—I just couldn't walk out on an eaves-dropping set-up like this. Here, in one quick earful, I'd learned more about Dr. Hunt and Dr. Winston than in all of my talks with the scientists back on earth. *They* had believed that if I could once *find* Dr. Hunt and provide a way for him to return, that he'd jump at the chance.

NOW I saw, as plain as day, that someone held such a club over him that he couldn't be sure which of his


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thoughts were his own. It was that *power*—the deep-cistern voice—which had made Hunt plan to strip me into a skeleton. It was Hunt's own mercy that had schemed to postpone my dissection.

And what of Winston? Winston—my fine, handsome hero with the suave manner and the kingly appearance!

Was Winston also in league with this superior agent? Were the two of them keeping Dr. Hunt in subjection?

"Making a turnip out of him!" I muttered to myself. "Squeezing the blood of genius out of him for their own stew."

Yes, Dr. Hunt had delayed my dissection out of his own inspiration to send me on a mission—to let me confront those skulking outcasts of space who called themselves the Mashas, to see whether I could learn, from the inside, what dangerous powers they possessed.

But hadn't Dr. Winston also had the same idea?

As I looked back upon their moment of inspiration, it seemd to me that both doctors had caught the idea simultaneously. It had happened under the purple light, when I had stood frozen with three pygmies beneath my open jaws. I wondered—

Swish-swish-swish — that was Dr. Winston, now sauntering toward another table. In another moment he would switch on a light.

I didn't dare creep any farther across the room. I might bump into the deep-voiced *power*.

Should I hide? Or should I face them?

After what I had just heard, they might kill me!

The wheeled-chair. It was right at hand. I crawled silently around it, into it, around its back and into the underside of it.

No squeaks, thank goodness. The repair man had oiled it recently. I wondered if he had put new upholstery on it too. My scales had gathered dust and rust from the roof. Would I leave marks?

I did a tall job of coiling myself, and quite a length of tail was left over. This, however, I automatically coiled into a disc of flesh, wound like a clock-spring, and allowed that end of me to fold over into the seat.

The lights went on along one wall.

I thought I caught a glimpse of the deep-cistern voice for just an instant, at the edge of the green glow. But I was uncertain. From the corner of my eye it seemed that I was seeing a huge model of a *human skull, almost as large as a barrel*. It was moving back out of my range of vision, and I didn't dare look. It must have been a piece of apparatus, I thought. Or was it a mask?

The deep-cistern voice came from that direction, and now I thought of it as a voice resounding through a large empty skull.

"I should go," the voice said. "Dr. Hunt shouldn't find us here together."

"He'll be in soon," said Winston. "He's holding court for the two men who let the serpent get away. As soon as he calls, I'll roll his chair in for him."

The deep voice chuckled. "Very fond of that throne, isn't he! Why don't you take that honor away from him?"

I SHUDDERED, and the chills tried to slide through the crooked route from my neck to my tail.

"You're tempting me," said Dr. Winston. I could see him standing a few feet in front of the chair, stroking his square jaws with his white, sensitive fingers.

"You might allow yourself four arms, too, you know," said the deep-voiced power. "Then you'd fit into the rolling


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

throne quite as gracefully as he does."

"I can fill it," Winston said, not sure but what he was being taunted. He was looking at me without seeing me. But the color effect of my green and purple scales made an impression. "Well, look at this!"

"What?"

"New upholstery job. Hunt's been asking for it. But I hadn't noticed—"

The phone on the chair gave two sharp rings.

"That's Hunt, calling for me," Winston said. "I'd just as well ride in. He'll never know."

He crawled into the seat and leaned back against the flattened coils of my flesh.

I could imagine that the deep-voiced power must have seen me by then. But I was wrong. He spoke, "Well, how does it feel? Quite important, eh? You'd like it, Winston. Think it over."

The phone rang again—two angry rings.

Dr. Winston touched the controls. The rolling chair gave a little lurch, then stopped short. I must have been weighing down on the brakes. I tried to shift just a trifle.

Two more rings.

"Why don't you go?" the voice called from the far side of the room. "He'll be suspicious."

"I'm *trying*—"

"Well, anyway, *I'm* going. Think over what I told you."

The swish-swish-swish gave me the picture of large soft-surfaced feet beneath that barrel-sized skull—though I must say it wasn't a very complete picture in my mind. All I knew was that the mysterious man—or creature—who directed the goings-on of these laboratories with a sinister hand, was making a quiet exit. I leaned, trying to catch one more glimpse. My effort was too much for the balance of the chair. I saw the disappearing shadow of a huge skull, with light from an outer room gleaming through a translucent eye. Then the rear door closed.

The chair was tipping backwards. I touched my hand to the floor just in time to avoid a spill.

"Oooof!"

Dr. Winston jerked forward. Then he sat back, testing the seat. He bounced a little, and was about to get out to see what was wrong; but the coils of my tail (which he had taken for new green-and-purple upholstery) moved just a trifle—just enough to catch a light grip on his waist.

He pushed the "upholstery" back and brushed his hands, muttering, "Sticky!"

Then Dr. Hunt came striding in, looking tough enough to eat glass.

"What's the matter? Why didn't you come?" Dr. Hunt stopped short, giving Winston the cold eye. "What's this? Have you traded places with me?"

"Something's wrong," said Winston weakly. "I couldn't get it to go."

"Get out of there. I'll show you how."

"I'm stuck in the new upholstery," said Winston.

"*New* upholstery? *What* new—*Ugh!*"

The doctor's eyes jumped in a way that caused Winston to turn pale. Or perhaps it was the fact that I had considered it time to uncurl myself, having no desire to usurp Dr. Hunt's pet throne.

Once I started, I uncurled rapidly; but the curve of my tail slid into a loop around Dr. Winston's waist, and I drew him right over the back of the chair. When my action began he gave a gulping sound and started to mutter some sort of prayer under his breath; but a moment later he was saying nothing, for he saw me and fainted dead


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

away.

I dropped him on the floor and turned to drink in Dr. Hunt's frozen stare. I glanced upward, for a moment thinking that the paralysis ray must be on. No, it was simply Dr. Hunt trying hard to believe his own eyes.

## CHAPTER XV

I GAVE a bow and a hiss and tried to ease a very tense situation by laughing lightly.

"Well, what next!" Dr. Hunt gasped.

"Did they tell you I was missing?" I said. "I came back. I came into Laboratory H to report, but there was some kind of conference going on."

"Yes?"

"So I thought I'd wait by your chair and tell you when you came in. You should know what they were saying."

Dr. Hunt mopped his forehead and checked up on his sharp mustaches and beard as if he thought they might be missing. Then he gathered his faculties together and began to talk, heedless of what I was about to tell him.

"I've been getting you ready for a job," he said. The glint in his eye told me that he considered it important for me to prepare quickly and indulge in no foolishness. He gave me a motion to stand to one side. I waited by the wall while he gave Winston a few slaps with all four of his hands to bring the man to life. Winston came up nodding and blinking, and sat while Dr. Hunt gave me his orders.

"You've come back to this lab after you were away and free—am I right?"

"Right," I said.

"Then you'll come back again," he said, "and I'm going to depend on it. I have faith that you're a straight serpent. See?"

I didn't deter him with any hints that I might or I might not be, depending upon his plans for turning me into a museum-piece. I knew now that, if left to his own devises, Dr. Hunt would postpone that unpleasantness for me as long as possible.

"I'm going to send you on your assignment at once," Dr. Hunt said. "Come this way and I'll show you the map of the territory once more."

I looked at Dr. Hunt and saw that he meant business. So he wasn't going to make me account for my runaway act. Instead, he was going to press me into service before I embarked on any more monkeyshines.

I might have complied without any hesitation, and considered it an honor —if I hadn't caught a sidelong glance from Winston, sitting there, watching me with a cold eye. The fellow was still badly chilled, I knew. He kept rubbing his sides where my scales had clutched him. But the real part of his scare was because I knew too much.

"This way," Dr. Hunt repeated, motioning to me with three or four arms.

I stamped about, folded my lower legs under me, and rose high on my forelegs, craning my neck and head upward as if I meant to be heard. I caught a glimpse of myself reflected in some of the glass utensils, and my very pose helped to inspire me for what I needed to say.

"It it high time, Dr. Hunt, that you and I cleared some atmosphere between us," I said.

The doctor's beard gave an impatient twitch, but he stopped cold and took me in.

"I came here from the earth for a purpose," I said. "I came in the guise of a pilot for Ernest Marsch, who is planning some commercial enterprise from this planet. But my real reason for coming was *to get you.*"

Dr. Hunt placed his fists on his hips. "Why should you want to get me?"



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Because you're too useful a scientist to desert the earth. I want to take you back. Your own planet and your own solar system need you."

"I'm doing very well here, thank you," said Hunt. I saw him cast a quick look at Winston before he added, "After all, I'm running the best research laboratory you ever saw. You haven't convinced me that there's anything more advanced on the earth."

"Granted," I said. "But maybe I *can* convince you that *you aren't running this place*. You should have heard what I just heard. Dr. Winston and that deep-voiced fellow have just been gloating over the way they're duping you, Dr. Hunt!"

MY WORDS struck hard. I thought the doctor's mustaches were going to spike his eyebrows. All four of his hands came up in defense. I went on:

"*They're* planning to turn me into a laboratory skeleton, and they forced that plan into your mind, *somehow*," I said. "You were all ready to go through with it, too. You've even set up a pedestal for my bones to rest on. But your *own* good scientific judgment got the better of you and made you wait. You know that I'm more valuable alive than dead. If you can observe me, and watch me function, and prove my usefulness—"

The doctor was moving toward me slowly, with a wonderful light of curiosity in his fine face.

"*Who* did you say is duping me?" he asked slowly.

"Dr. Winston and some fellow with a voice like a deep cistern."

Winston sprang to his feet. "Don't believe a word of it. That snake is just hissing to hear his own breath."

"*Is* he?" Dr. Hunt scowled deeply.

"I'll keep right on hissing," I said. "I'll tell you both what I overheard while I was hiding around that chair. The deep-voiced fellow said it wouldn't be good for the two of them to be found here together."

"Very interesting," said the doctor.

"And he tempted Winston to take over your throne."

"Indeed."

"Stop it!" Winston cried. "I'm your friend, Dr. Hunt, and you know it."

"We all know, Dr. Hunt," I went on, gesturing with my long arm, "that you came here because you were forced to come. Do you admit that, Dr. Hunt?"

Hunt was too busy searching Winston's eyes to answer me. Winston was coming toward him, both hands extended, and he was doing a good job of imploring.

"*I'm* your *friend*, Dr. Hunt," he was saying. "You *know* I'm your friend. You're not going to listen to that—that *snake!*"

"He's a snake by an accident of fate," Hunt growled. "But if he's lying, I'll see that he's boiled in oil." He turned to me. "What did this deep-voiced fellow look like?"

"I didn't see him," I said. "I only saw the shadow of a big skull."

"How big was he?"

"I don't know. It was dark, and after I hid in the chair I couldn't turn to see, even after the lights went on. But I'd know his voice among ten million voices."

"Which way did he go?"

"Out that door. You had rung, and he said it was time for him to leave."

Winston began to laugh. He mocked my words so thoroughly that he almost shook me loose from the facts I had seen with my own eyes.

There wasn't anything more I could do or say. I had played my hand, and I was losing. You see, it wasn't easy


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for Dr. Hunt to place any trust in a newcomer like me on such short acquaintance. I had already pulled my share of snaky tricks, and this might be another. I couldn't reach in a secret pocket and pull out a fistful of credentials that proved the earth scientists had sent me here to bring Hunt back. I didn't even have a pocket. I only had scales and a pair of deceitful looking eyes and a monstrous form that made men shudder to look at me.

"If you'll pardon me," said Winston, "I think I'll go take a bath. That slimy thing left me with the creeps."

*That* was all he needed to say. *I was a snake.* Any warning truths I might offer were *just so much hissing.*

"I'll give you some pointers on the new experiment a little later, Dr. Winston," Dr. Hunt said with his usual professional manner—and that was enough to convince me that I hadn't dented the confidence that existed between these two. Dr. Hunt turned to me. "As for you, you may either go forth on your assignment or return quietly to your cage. Which will it be?"

## CHAPTER XVI

I MOVED along at a slow, thoughtful crawling pace through the remainder of the night, watching the last of the six moons slide silently through the skies.

The air was fresh and fragrant, and I was glad to be away from the odors of the mountain fortress. A whiff of blossom scents caused me to turn my course toward the long jagged black line, far down the valley, which I knew to be the crevasse.

That crevasse, with its river two miles below the surface of the land, had offered me plenty of pain since I had first fallen into this weird world. But it was not like the pain that I suffered now—the pain of not being trusted. Strange to say, I felt a nostalgic attraction for the crevasse again, and half wished that I might return to its rocky walls and bathe again in its warm waters.

What a mood! I was nursing my injuries. I was sore because Dr. Hunt hadn't toppled for my first invitation to junk his set-up on Space Island and come back to the earth with me.

I was sore and disillusioned because Dr. Winston had so quickly collapsed from a fine, wholesome hero with a keen intellect to a sinister, conniving heel.

*Was* he that? Somehow I continued to cling to a hope that he wasn't. If that deep-cistern voice had managed to put a malicious bug in Dr. Hunt's brain, maybe he had done the same thing for Dr. Winston. Maybe he was duping both of the boys and making suckers out of them.

I looked back to the road that led to the mountain fortress. Why had I come away before I had got to the bottom of these things? Why hadn't I stayed at least long enough to *see* that deep-cistern voice and find out where *it* lived and what *it* meant to do.

Could it have been some sort of animal, like myself, with a heavy human skull—a deep throat—soft swishy feet?

Then as I lay on the soft grass and closed my eyes to turn my troubles over in a half-sleeping mind, my thoughts returned to the missing Ernest Marsch . . . I wondered. . . .

How long ago it seemed! . . . I was thinking back to our flight. . . .

We had been flying through space only an hour, I recalled, when Flora Hessel first discovered that Marsch had deceived her.

"Where is my female companion?" Flora had asked.


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The incident came back clearly through the channels of memory.

"I'd told you there'd be a female companion to travel with you," Marsch had answered sharply, "and I've kept my promise. Now stop your silly worrying."

It was Flora Hessel's first trip away from the earth, and although I was kept busy in the control room, I could hear snatches of their conversation, and I knew that she was uneasy. I dreaded to think that she might be that way all the way from the solar system to Space Island. But she was being reasonable and patient. All she wanted to know, now that we had embarked from the earth, was, who was her female companion and why couldn't they meet at once and get acquainted?

Ernest Marsch lighted a cigar and began to pace uneasily. I saw that his mate, Pete Hogan, was getting nervous, watching to see what Marsch meant to do. *I* knew, and Hogan must have known, that there wasn't any other lady on board the ship.

"Your companion's name is Terry," said Marsch. "Ma Terry. She's in the second stateroom having a nap. No use to wake her. She's a safe enough companion for anyone. She likes people and she has a soft heart, just like you, Miss Hessel. You two ought to get along just fine."

I SAW Pete Hogan gulp. He didn't say a word. Whenever Ernest Marsch made a statement, it stood; Hogan was not one to cross him up.

Marsch came toward the control room, his wide shoulders filling the doorway for a moment. He saw that I was busy, and blowing a puff of smoke in my direction he closed the door on me, so that I wouldn't notice what happened next.

But I was curious, so I set the controls and opened the visor that gave me a view of the main room.

Flora Hessel was getting angry and suspicious. When Marsch tried to divert her from her questions by putting an arm around her, she began to storm. She didn't want any of his petting. All she wanted was to see Ma Terry.

I opened the door a crack to hear the conversation, then.

"Get Ma Terry," Marsch said to Hogan, champing angrily on his cigar.

"If you say so."

"I said so, didn't I? Get her."

"Miss Hessel may be kinda disappointed," Pete Hogan said dubiously.

"Shut up!"

Hogan shrugged and went to the second stateroom and opened the door. He whistled. "Come, Terry."

Out came a little black-and-white terrier dog.

"She's a Mamma Terrier," Marsch said out of curled lips. "We call her Ma Terry for short. That's your female companion. I always keep my promises. She's gentle and soft hearted, just like you. You two ought to get along just fine."

Flora Hessel walked up to Marsch, then, and slapped his face. He was red and white and purple, and he came at her with a fist. Hogan gave a gesture as if to stop him, and gulped a scared, "Don't do it—don't."

But I was the guy who dashed in and put the strongarm on the boss in time to keep Flora from getting her teeth knocked out. One solid sock to his jaw did the trick. He lay in the corner for two hours and no one touched him.

Flora kept to her room most of the time after that, though she occasionally came into the main room when several of us were gathered there—for lunch, or a game of cards, or a round of sky-study. Marsch must have felt


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that he'd pulled a pretty crude gag when she refused to warm up to his advances. Evidently he had thought she'd fall into his arms, not because he was so handsome, but because he was the boss and was able to talk in big terms about some nebulous commercial venture he was getting ready to launch from Space Island.

He kept his temper under control, for the most part; but his savage feelings were right there under the surface, and he saved a choice bit of demonstration for Flora. It happened after Flora had made friends with "Ma Terry" and had got in the habit of feeding the dog right after our lunch, talking as kindly with it as she might have with her own sister. Marsch had watched with growing jealousy and waited for his chance.

Then it came: the dog got under his feet by mistake, and he gave it a kick. It whimpered, and he kicked it again. Flora asked him to stop, and that was all he needed. In a fit of anger he kicked "Ma Terry" to death.

After the dog was disposed of, Marsch walked back and forth through the ship, eying any of us who happened to be talking, as if just daring us to criticize his action. It was his expedition, and by god he'd run things as he pleased.

It was a pretty unhappy trip, after that. He and I were right on the ragged edge of a gun fight once when someone separated us. At another time I was already to walk into him with my fists swinging, when he changed his mind about something that had led to the trouble.

And so it had been, as we approached Space Island, that he and I were keeping an eye on each other like two suspicious hawks. And then, as we had slowed down and were moving through the atmosphere for a landing, a strange and unaccountable explosion had struck us—*BLAMMMM!*—and the blinding white light had been the last thing I had remembered. . . .

And the next thing had been the water, deep down in the crevasse, hours and hours later . . . and I had awakened gradually to discover that I had become a serpent. . . .

Now the new day was dawning, and I curled up in the edge of a thicket whose greenish-blue hues would give me a color protection from the eyes of any chance passers-by. The weight of my troubles had made me weary, and I thought I would sleep the forenoon away. And I might have, if a space ship hadn't come zooming down from the sky.

*BLAMMMM!*

## CHAPTER XVII

THE explosive qualities of Space Island were a fact to be reckoned with. Explosions were Space Island's official welcome, it seemed, for everything that dropped down out of the skies.

I had gone through it once myself. Later I had seen it happen to a dead space ship that floated in aimlessly. Now I was seeing it for the third time.

This was a shapely, well-knit ship that was obviously cruising into the valley for a landing. The deadly invisible trap caught it, and suddenly the splinters of wreckage were falling over a range of three or four miles, drifting down like so many feathers. I discerned a few human bodies among the falling objects. They were alive and kicking. Transformed? Well, not yet, at least. But soon!

Two of the falling men wore starchy blue uniforms, and one of these fell within a quarter of a mile of my hiding place. I sprang to my feet and went


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

into a high-powered snake gallop, using my swiftest crawling muscles to give myself an extra boost from the belly with every leap.

Within forty yards of the fallen officer I stopped, hid myself, and waited.

He had struck easily, not like a man falling to the earth, but with the airiness of a balloon. He was sufficiently stunned, however, that he crawled off dizzily on his hands and knees. Should I have helped him up? I might have scared the poor fellow out of his wits. I waited, then slowly followed to keep him in sight.

Now it was apparent that he might have remained in his human form. But he was crawling toward a pool of water, and as soon as he began to drink, and to bathe his face, *it happened.*

It was a sight to watch, and I don't think I'd have stopped it if he had been my own grandfather.

His clothing began to fall away from him. He was resting on his hands and knees over the water. Like anyone else, he felt the need of the life-giving fluid after the blast of heat and pain he'd gone through.

His neck and head began to take on a beast-like shape. His body shortened and his legs contracted into the legs of pigs.

Legs, feet, ears, *snout! He was a wretched, grunting hog!*

He looked back at his clothes and gave a snort of disgust. Then he stood there, quite as dazed as a prizefighter who has taken a knockout. With his front feet in the edge of the pool and his snout burrowing senselessly in the mud, he let his eyes fall closed and went comfortably to sleep.

It had all happened within a few minutes of the explosion. What a strange landing!

Later I was to learn from Kipper more of the forces back of such events. The force that caused the explosions was a ray which emanated from a horizontal ray-gun imbedded in the mountains somewhere above the scientists' fortress. It and several others like it guarded the several surrounding valleys from the dangers of falling objects. If giant meteorites fell through space to land here, they, like all other approaching objects, must pass through the plane where the invisible rays would break them into pieces and retard their fall.

But the ray was not intended to be deadly in its effect upon living creatures. And the ray did not transform. The transformations were produced by certain natural elements—as I shall explain in a moment.

I looked beyond the sleeping pig, remembering that there were other fallen men to be considered.

One of them I spied less than a mile away. He had come through with no damage whatever. He was walking slowly toward the low foothills that lay pink in the morning sun. I slipped along cautiously for many yards, then stopped abruptly. His voice? Was he crying for help?

He was calling. I crawled closer until I caught his words.

*"A messssage for the Massshas!"* He was singing it out to the foothills. *"A messssage for the Massshas!"*

No, he wasn't out of his head. He knew exactly what he was doing. He and all the rest of this small party had come here with the intention of making contact with the Mashas. And this was the password.

It worked. Right away a delegation of twelve or fifteen pygmies came running out of the foothills to greet him.

Why? What was going on here? Another of the newcomers also moved toward the foothills, calling the password.

(Continued on page 132



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# ALL FLESH IS BRASS

*By Milton Lesser*



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

**When you put lead into these warriors it might stop them and it might not. And you always wondered what would fly out of their heads — bolts or brains**

SOMEWHERE on the Northern Front, January 1. I think the Ivans are beginning to learn they have nothing on us with their famous Russian winter. Until recently they had never tried the good old United States variety, served North Dakota style. Now that they have, they'll learn.

I'm a fine one to talk.

I'm with the Regulars and I was born and bred a city boy. Place called The Bronx, although now The Bronx is the northeastern lip of Manhattan Hell Hole, spilling radioactive rubble down into the H-Crater.

At least, that's what some of the Replaces tell me; I wouldn't know myself: I haven't been there in fourteen months.

But let's get back to this North Dakota Winter. It's cold. It's so cold that every other thought of coldness

Copyright 1952 by Ziff-Davis Pub. Co.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you ever had just doesn't mean anything. It's the kind of nerve-chilling, bone-numbing cold that separates the men from the boys in a hurry. It comes in great, frigid gusts from the northland and it's too cold to stamp your feet or beat your chest. And whatever you do, the winter manual says, don't let the metal parts of your rifle come in contact with your bare skin. A guy I know tried it accidentally. He's been cleared to the hospital in Fargo, but they ought to keep the rifle as a warning. You don't have to come very close to see the strip of skin three inches by one inch stuck to it.

So, it's cold. But I'd better knock off this kind of thinking before I get morbid.

January 1, later. Last night was New Year's Eve. God knows where they got it from, but at about twenty-two hundred the medics came crawling and stumbling through the snow, leaving a pint of whisky in each fox hole.

A couple of minutes after I opened my pint and started drinking, I had a visitor.

A girl.

She wore the uniform of an Irregular—that is, she had on a helmet and a white armband which said U.S.A. The shoe-packs were strictly home-made, the denim trousers frozen stiff, the mackinaw which came almost to her knees covered with snow. She came tumbling into the foxhole so fast that, had she been an Ivan, I'd have been dead.

"Mind?" she said, plunging her rifle-stock into the snow and hunkering down beside it.

I shook my head. "Two bodies will make this hole warmer than one." I gulped another mouthful of the whisky, discovered with no particular interest it was rye.

Her mittened hand closed over mine. A small hand. "Please," she said.

I looked at her. She had a nice face which, however, would have failed entirely to inspire an artist. "Where you coming from?" I said, taking another drink.

Her hand stayed put. "Please." She snuffled, and wiped her running nose on her sleeve. "Up front a ways. Patrol action."

"They taking many girls?"

"As many as will join. I can shoot this gun; I guess that's all they're interested in since the Ivans started pouring over the Canadian border. Please."

I cursed softly and handed her the bottle. She hardly paused to breathe, downing the half-pint which remained in four gulping swallows. She blinked, she wiped her lips, coughed, tossed the empty pint carelessly up over her shoulder and into the frozen night.

"Thanks."

"Damn it! Why'd you have to show up?"

"It makes you warm. Doesn't it?"

"Yeah. Yeah, I guess. How long you been fighting?"

"Three days."

"No training?"

"No training. My husband—"

"You married?" She looked so young.

"I was. My husband got back from the English Evacuation with one arm shot off. Three days ago the Ivans found us and killed him. I fled south and joined up. Smoke?"

When I nodded eagerly, she got two cigarettes out of the breast pocket of her mackinaw, lighted them, passed one to me.

We smoked and talked till my watch said twelve o'clock.

"Happy New Year," she said.

"Happy New Year."

Then we got some sleep. A year ago I never would have believed it. There we were, bundled up like a



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

couple of Eskimos but still trying to keep warm. We lay huddled together, breast to breast, and I could feel her heart thumping. We spent that night as close as a couple of logs in an ice jam—and just as dispassionately.

She was up with the first gray streaks of dawn. She clambered up the side of the fox-hole three times and slipped back down the slippery snow each time.

"Here," I said. She started up again and I got both my hands under her fanny and heaved. She went up and over and plowed head-first into the snow. She turned around, looked down at me, grinned. She waved and was on her way. Probably I'll never see her again. It was an hour till I remembered I'd forgotten to ask her name.

JANUARY 5. Colder still, but no fresh snow. The Ivans laid down a brief artillery barrage, but it was enough to splash purple and orange flame all over the tundra. Rations giving out. I'll have to get some company soon or starve to death.

JANUARY 7. Great news! I'm being shipped to the rear for two days of rest and warmth. Chaplain came around and said so, and *I* felt like blessing *him!* He tells me I'll have a bed back there, in a house with four walls, although probably the ceiling's been blown off. I'll settle for the bed alone as long as it has a blanket. Well, I'll find out pretty soon.

JANUARY 8. This is the life. Hot soup this morning, with savory hunks of meat in it. Served in bed, if you please, by a gal with looks. And Chaplain was pessimistic: there's a ceiling here!

But the guy in the bed next to me dampened it all with a sordid story. I can't make up my mind if it's true or not.

"Are you a Replace?" he said. He was a short, gnarled man, balding, with deep-set eyes, red-rimmed and unhealthy-looking. Replace? That's short for Replacement.

I told him no, I wasn't.

"Good. Good. But watch them Replaces. Oh yes, keep your eye on them, you mark my words."

"What for? You mean because they're green?"

"No. Not on acounta that. Because some of them ain't human."

I told him I thought he was joking.

"I'm not joshing, young feller. Name's Ben. You think old Ben would josh about a thing like that? I read the Book and I'm a God-fearing man and don't you forget it. But some of the Replaces, they ain't human."

I smiled. "Now, if you said the Ivans weren't human, I'd agree with you. They're like machines." I still thought he was joking. But that stuff about the Ivans isn't so funny. The way I understand it, top brass suspects most of them are cokey. "But shoot," I went on. "They probably eat hashish instead of C-rations and heroin instead of K."

"I doubt it," the small, gnarled man named Ben said very seriously. "They probably came up with the Invention sooner than we did, that's all." He said it like that. Invention. Like it should have a capital letter.

"The Invention?" I asked Ben. "What invention?"

"A new kind of Replace. Awful." Ben grunted and sat back complacently, as if because he'd told me that much now it wasn't his worry any longer.

I leaned over and prodded his shoulder while the nurse brought me another cup of soup. "What kind of Replace?"

Ben shrugged. "Not sure. Mechanical, though, instead of human."

"You mean robots?"

"Didn't say that."


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Damn it, say what you mean then!"

"Not sure I know. But there's a rumor—troube is, son, you've been at the front too long. You get to miss what's going on. Like the Good Book says—"

"Never mind what the Good Book says. *You* said something about robots."

"Did not. Mechanical Replaces, not robots. There's a world of difference, son. All the medical outfits are staffed with a lot of cybernetics men, too. You know, thinking-machine stuff. Man comes in from the front. Dying. If they get him quick they have ways to duplicate his body and reproduce the complicated electrical impulses which make up his mind. He thinks he's a man. He don't know no better. But he's a machine. A better fighting man, sure. But a machine. If the Ivans have them too, it gives you a kind of creepy feeling. Fighting machines which think they're men." Ben shuddered, lapsed into troubled silence.

JANUARY 10. Well, I'm on my way back to the front. Funny guy, Ben. He didn't say another word till right before I left. I tried to get a conversation going a couple of times, but he merely grunted and averted his head. Before I left he said goodbye, and that was all. January 11. I'd better run some of these entries together like this because I'm running low on paper. After two days of warmth, the front is colder than ever. I wonder, do pleasure and pain always buck each other that way? January 12. Snowed all day and all night. A couple of Ivan's jets flew over, but apparently just on reconnaissance. They came in real low because the snow brought visibility down below the level of the tree tops. I think one of the jets got into trouble with the AA boys a couple of miles from here, but it's hard to tell.

JANUARY 14. Still snowing.

JANUARY 16. Talk about your miracles. Miss New Year's Eve came back today, quite by accident. Her name is Beth and she's been delivering messages until they shoved her back into the infantry. Mine was the first fox-hole she happened to find. This time *she* had the whisky and *I* did the grubbing, but Beth didn't mind at all. If I knew Beth could keep me supplied with whisky like that, I'd ask her to marry me.

JANUARY 17. Beth tells me she's scared. At first I thought it was what the aid-man said when he brought up some chow. Rumor of a big Ivan push coming, despite the snow and the cold. Kicking off tomorrow at dawn unless G2 got some cockeyed information. But Beth says that isn't what's worrying her.

Dames, I thought. But then she made like what's-his-name—like Ben.

"It's the Replaces," said Beth. "More and more of them with that stony-eyed look, almost like they weren't alive, Charlie." That's me, Charlie.

"I know," I said, and laughed. "They're machines. Carbon copies of men who got theirs on the front and died. Good copies, but machines. Terrible stuff."

"Why, yes! That's just what I had in mind, Charlie."

"You're nuts," I told her. "I heard the same thing from a nut in a rear area."

Beth insisted, "You'll hear it every place you go. A thing like that gets around."

"I haven't heard anything."

"You have too. From me and—and the rear area nut."

"It's smoke from the embers of a dung fire," I said, borrowing an expression from the Ivans which had got



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

popular with our boys. "I don't believe a word of it." I snickered. "Next thing you'll be telling me, you're one of the robots."

Beth shook her head. "Of course I'm not. But not robots, Charlie. One of the worst part of it is, the Replaces don't even know. They think they're men. Only they're not afraid like men, and they don't get so cold, either. The sober rumors say they last about a year or two and then break down.

"But I thought of what you said. Right after I began to put two and two together about the Replaces. I had to make sure. I—I experimented on myself. I went without food and I got hungry. I cut my hand with a knife and I bled."

"That's funny," I said. "You really believed it."

Beth shrugged in the cold, leaned toward me, took my hand. By the time I realized something funny was going on, it was too late. Beth had my mitten between her teeth, and she bit. I yelped and pulled away, but the experiment had already been conducted to her satisfaction. Blood welled up sluggishly, stained my mitten a dull red and froze an almost chocolate-brown color a few moments later.

"You're human," said Beth.

I didn't answer. I felt good and sore, sore enough to cut my nose to spite my face. I didn't bundle with Beth that night. She stayed put on her side of the fox-hole; I curled up, shivering with the cold, on mine. I slept poorly, but so did Beth. Damn her, though—my hand throbbed all night.

JANUARY 18. It's late afternoon now, and G2 hit it right on the head. The sky all around us is pulsing with that purple-orange glow which spells out, clear as anything, rocket barrage. And I got the chance to shoot at some Ivans this morning—that is, before I had to high-tail it back a mile with Beth. The line is stabilized there, more or less, but the Ivans are still mounting their power for a thrust at our center—about three miles west of here. The artillery is pounding and thudding off in that direction, and kicking up great splashes of snow. I got me two Ivans, I think, and Beth claims one. But Regulars and Irregulars dotted the snow all around us as we ran, and Beth cried a little. More later.

JANUARY 18, later. God! I still can't believe it. If a girl were brought up in a cloister and then introduced to the facts of life by a brutal sex-fiend, she might feel something like this. Trouble was, I didn't believe. I didn't *want* to believe what everyone told me. I believe now. I have to. I saw for myself.

It happened like this. Beth and I were hacking away at the frozen ground under the snow with our bayonets, for even a shallow hole would be some protection against the wind and the cold. About half an hour after we got started, someone began crawling over to us. Beth saw him first, dragging himself across the snow and yelling. We both ran to him, but I got there before Beth did.

There was a hole where his chest should have been. A gaping hole with plenty of snow in it. He should have been dead, but he dragged himself along, yelling. The hole went all the way through to his back and the snow came out there. A nice clean hole with white snow going in the bottom and coming out the top, still white.

Beth saw him and screamed. He clutched at his chest and screamed back. The hole was smooth and even, but that could happen if a high-velocity rocket passed through you cleanly. Of course, you wouldn't live to tell about it.


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This man did.

Something gleamed against the snow as he tried to raise himself on his haunches. Metallic. A coil of thick wire, but twisted and bent. Protruding from the hole in his chest. He looked at me and said, "I swear I didn't know—"

I carry a pistol which I got from a dead Ivan officer. I took it out and felt it slap back savagely against my palm as I shot the wounded man's head off. Literally. In pieces. Metal pieces. I was sick after that, and so was Beth.

I think I'll make love to Beth tonight. It will help some. Probably, though, it won't help enough.

JANUARY 19. *Boom! Crash! Blat!* I can hardly hear myself think. Trust those Ivans to out-guess the guessers and come up with something foxy. They raked the center of our line with zero'd-in artillery so that we concentrated our reserve behind it. Then they cut away quickly and drove their salient three miles away—*here!* They tore through our line like it was paper and they cut around and half way behind our reserve before it could deploy itself properly.

I've got to put down this pencil for my rifle, says Beth. More later.

APRIL 14. That's right, April 14. Beth is dead. It was January 19 when it happened. During the big Ivan push. She got it quick and clean. I don't think she even knew what hit her. I'll miss her.

I got mine the same day, with an old-fashioned recoil rifle, of all things. Somehow, a couple of aid-men found me, carried me to the field hospital. The way I understand it they did some emergency work there, then shipped me to Base Hospital in Fargo. Today's my first day back at the front. They really rush things, those medicos.

Incredible as it seems, we somehow managed to stop Ivan in his tracks. Skillful leadership? Plucky foot soldiers? There are all sorts of answers, but I've got one of my own. Ben knew what was going on, and Beth. The Replaces. More and more of them every day. Metal men. Duplicates of men who died in battle, every tiny aspect of their brains and physical features copied to the last detail. Metal men who can go on and on because they don't get tired like mere humans. Evidently we can make more of them than the Ivans can. So now we're winning.

It's not a secret any more. Too many of the metal men have been blasted by artillery at the front. Too many have been strewn over an acre or so of ground, their tiny, intricate metal parts gleaming more brightly than the snow. The Replaces will never be forgotten. They're going to win this war for us, and then they'll die. All of them. In a year or two, for they're not constructed to last longer than that. A couple million metal men—looking like humans but with different drives and different joys—would be quite a strain on peace-time social structure.

APRIL 15. The snow has begun to thaw in the northern hills. The winds are still icy, but they haven't bothered me. Been thinking of Beth again.

APRIL 26. We've cleared Ivan out of continental U.S.A.! That calls for a celebration, especially since the men in New Pentagon declare they'll be out of the Western Hemisphere inside of six months. Wouldn't be too surprised if the counter-invasion of Fortress Europe got under way before Christmas.

MAY 14. Peculiar change in the Replaces we're getting here in central Canada. The metal ones are proud of it. They let you know right off, saying they're better than flesh any day.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fights more and more frequent, with the Replaces coming off best, naturally. I don't like it.

MAY 15. I don't like it at all. I saw my first metal versus human battle today, with a couple of hundred soldiers on each side. At first I thought it was strictly behind U.S. lines—but about an hour after the fracas started a fewscore metal men breezed in from the *other* side of the front. Metal Ivans fighting with metal G.I. Joe's against flesh-and-blood G.I.'s. Artillery finally got the Replaces, but not before they'd killed about seventy-five men.

MAY 28. At an Eastern P.O.E. Looks like I was wrong. The Invasion of Fortress Europe—words on everyone's lips—will come a lot sooner than expected. I'm shipping out tomorrow or the next day. Destination? Probably Iceland. The British Isles will be part of the free world again by September. Unless the Replaces become a serious menace. Right now I don't know what to think.

MAY 31. At Sea in the North Atlantic. The Replaces are everywhere. Two-thirds of the troops aboard ship openly admit their identity.

JUNE 1. We're turning back in mid-voyage. I don't understand. The Replaces are jubilant, though.

JUNE 4. In the Catskill Mountains. The War is over! Nothing to applaud about, however. For there's a new war and one which, from all indications, will be worse. Metal-man versus flesh—to the death. The Replaces bombed New Pentagon and the hush-hush laboratory nearby, and now they don't have to worry about death in a year or two. At least, that's what they say. It has something to do with a storehouse of electrical records in the lab. The bombing destroyed it completely—and with it, flesh-man's ability to kill metal-man at will.

New York was in Replace hands, but it was comparatively easy to escape to these hills a hundred miles northwest of the city. Everything's so disorganized. One thing is clear: the Replaces are fashioning recruits. *Something* has to account for the fact that one man out of three seems to be metal. According to one newspaper I saw in the city—the last paper to be printed before the Replaces took over—almost every army man who was severely wounded some time during the past sixteen months was turned into a Replace, most of them with no knowledge of the transformation at all.

And now the Replaces roam the countryside at night, capturing recruits. You can't create artificial men at will. You've got to copy a flesh-man first. And it's said the Replaces are choosy, too. They'd like to kill off a good percentage of the population, save the remainder for slave-labor, and live the metal life of Riley. They might do just that. Pretty grim....

JUNE 6. HOW dumb can I get? It was staring me in the face all along. I won't say till I'm sure, though. Objective note on the doings of the day: the Replaces are winning everywhere. Mankind, the original mankind, is doomed.

JUNE 10. To hell with waiting any longer. I'm going down from the hills into the large town of Liberty this afternoon. I should have realized it long before this. I've been fighting on the wrong side! A new and glorious future awaits *homo superior,* the man of metal. *I am a Replace.*

JUNE 11. Liberty, New York, is a nice town. The Replaces accepted me, their brother, with open arms. More about this later.

JUNE 11. Later. The last few hu-


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mans are being dragged from the hills around Liberty for execution. If the New Order is to get off to a flying start, there must be some bloodshed. But an amusing thing happened a few minutes ago. Interrogated by an Intelligence Officer, I was really given the third degree:

Q. Do you know for a fact that you are a Replace?

A. Of course I'm a Replace. (Details about my front-line injury and what followed.)

Q. That strikes you as proof enough?

A. Naturally.

Q. There are simple tests. Will you submit to them?

A. I don't have much choice—but I don't have anything to worry about, either.

So that's the status. They've arranged for me to be tested tomorrow.

JUNE 12. *Homo sapiens* has surrendered unconditionally! Our poor half-brother had no choice, really. We sprang up on all sides of him. We abducted a wife, killed her, copied her. An hour later she returned, armed, to slay her unsuspecting husband. Our Replace husbands brought their wives in bodily for destruction and copying, provided they merited it. The new Era dawns.... It says precisely that on a proclamation issued this morning. But more about it later. Right now, I must take my test.

*LATER*. Last entry. The test was simple.

Someone held me. Someone else hit me. Repeatedly. In the nose. I learned my lesson: never jump to conclusions.

I bled....

THE END

SCIENCE FICTION•FANTASY
FANTASTIC

-----CLIP AND MAIL THIS MONEY-SAVING COUPON TODAY.-----

Enter my subscription for FANTASTIC STORIES

6 Issues only $2.50 ..... 12 Issues only $4.50 .....

Name _____

Address _____

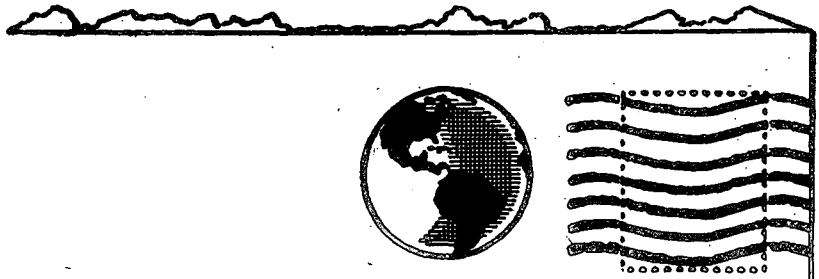
City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Send the following free issues .....
(Add 50¢ per year additional postage for Canada and Pan American countries; and $1 per year extra for all other foreign orders.)

Mail to: Fantastic / Box 7, Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y. 11364



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



# According to you...

*With this issue we reintroduce FANTASTIC's letter column after a considerable absense from these pages. We would have done so sooner, but we simply had* no *letters to print! Even now, this department is truncated because of the sheer dearth of letters. Letters intended for publication here should be addressed to* According to You *c/o P.O. Box 73, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11232.*

Dear Mr. White:

We have to take this opportunity to tell you how "thrilled" we are that you have decided to "take" our material for your darling little "periodical." You just can't *imag*ine how excited we both are! And wait until they hear about this at the Poughkeepsie Decent Literature League!

Oh, oh, oh, we're just so all atwitter and aflutter that we'd better stop now or we'll do something just *foolish* and *embarassing* right here in the envelope, and wouldn't that just be *silly* of us!

Yours most faithfully,
Blodwen Blenheim *and*
Ova Hamlet

*The Misses Blenheim and Hamlet (I believe they are Misses!) are responsible for "Man Swings SF" in this issue.—TW*

Dear Mr. White:

I hope that you print some sword and sorcery yarns of the Tolkein or Robert E. Howard type. FANTASTIC is the last home of these type of yarns.

Michael Walsh

Dear Ted:

I have read all ten of the Conan books published up to now and found them to be some of the best books I have ever read. I think you should get de Camp or Carter to write some Conan stories for FANTASTIC, seeing how well they can write the Conan stories.

The following is a short poem I wrote, titled "Conan":

You've slashed your way through
many a land, with fire and with
sword
You've cleared a path with your
mighty wrath, that will never be
restored
As thief, soldier, and mercenary, to
lands no other has seen
As King of Aquilonia, with son and
with a queen
But will that hold you? Nay, it won't,
for adventure is in your veins
Tonight you sail for distant shores,
happy to be at sea again
Never to be seen by man nor friend,
and all young ladies will cry
We'll mourn you long, but we'll know
strong that in our hearts you'll

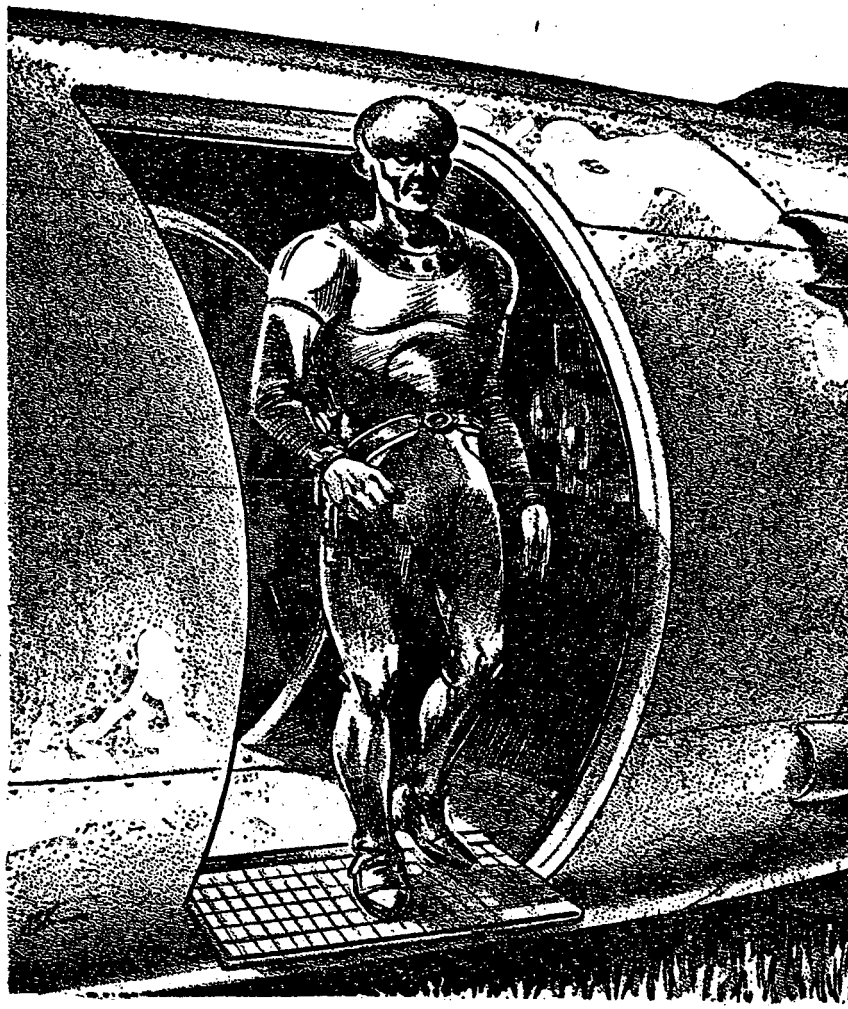
(Continued on page 119)



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# ISOLATIONIST

## By Mack Reynolds



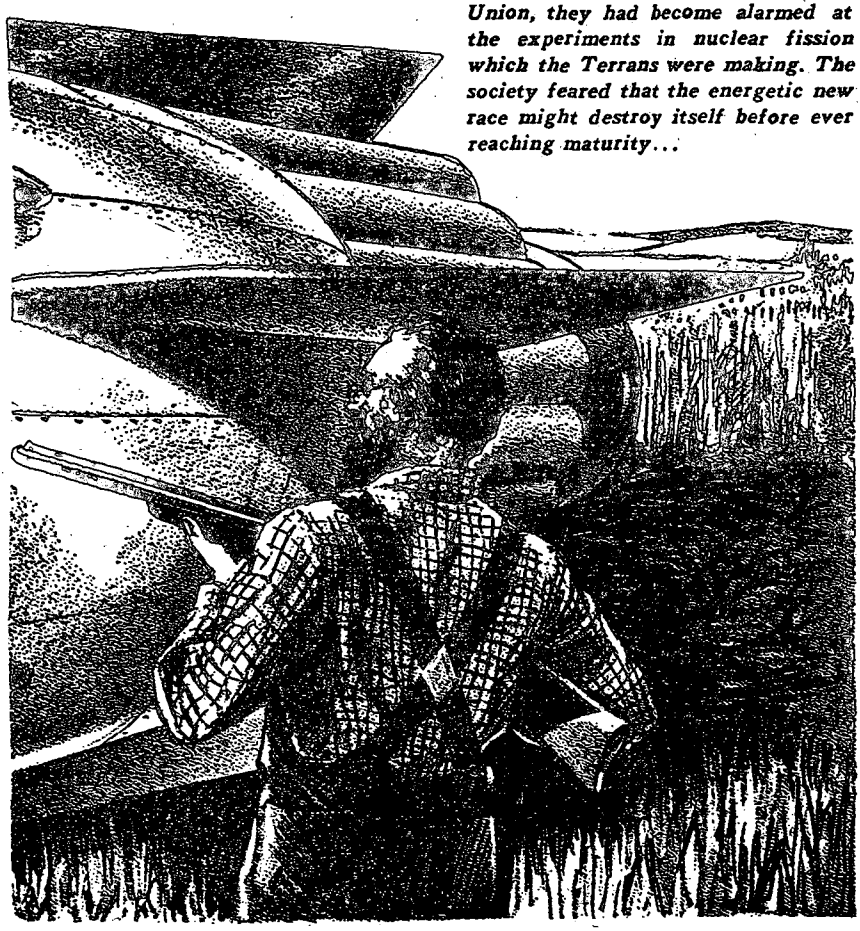
Copyright 1950 by Ziff-Davis Publishing Co.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Their mission was to save Earth. But the only man they met was against "foreign entanglements!"

*THE FIRST attempt on the part of members of the Galactic Union to open communication with Planet K3LT14, known to its inhabitants as Earth, or Terra, was made by a benevolent society of the Aldeberan System. Although the Aldeberans were acquainted with the fact that Terra had not as yet reached a civilization development of even DQ-14, and was, consequently, far from prepared to enter the Galactic Union, they had become alarmed at the experiments in nuclear fission which the Terrans were making. The society feared that the energetic new race might destroy itself before ever reaching maturity...*





LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

To begin with, I was probably feeling more crotchety than usual as a result of my trip into Harvey. Alone on the farm, and with more work than I can handle myself, I sometimes forget my bitterness; but my monthly trip to town will upset me for days afterward. Maybe I was more tolerant when I was younger and Ruth and the boys were still alive.

I'd got through my business without trouble and had stopped off in a restaurant before heading home. I should've known better. The food was cooked on an electric stove and came mostly from cans. In the corner stood a garishly painted music box, covered with neon lights that flickered the way they do until I felt my eyeballs were about to pop out. Over and over it played something about a room full of roses, and from time to time suffering patrons got up and put money into it, trying to bribe it into shutting up, I suppose; but that didn't do any good, it kept playing.

At first I thought the man sitting next to me was staring at my beard and ignored him, figuring that if he wanted to scrape his face raw with a razor every day, that was his business, but I'd leave my face the way nature planned it to be. But finally he spoke up, "You're Alex Wood, aren't you, with a farm about twenty miles out of town?"

I nodded.

He flashed me a professional smile and stuck out his hand to be shaken. So I shook it and dropped it, saying, "What're you selling?"

He laughed, the way salesmen d and explained, "My name is Brown, and my line is radio. I..."

I snorted. "I think radios ought to be taxed; wouldn't have one in my home." I went back to my food.

You'd think I'd told him I was a cannibal. "Why not?" he said. "Practically everybody..."

I stopped eating, again and said patiently, like as if I was talking to a youngster, "Because, if I had a radio somebody might turn it on, and then I'd have to listen to the confounded thing. They're worse than electric lights."

He blinked and his little salesman's mustache twitched. "What's wrong with electric lights?"

I wiggled a finger at him. "They turn night into day, which automatically turns day into night; and you wind up with nothing accomplished except you've missed the best hours of the twenty four by spending the dawn in bed."

HE WRINKLED up his forehead like as if he didn't know what I was talking about but was afraid to tell me I was crazy because he still had hopes of selling me something.

I didn't bother going further. What was the use? Like nearly everybody else, he probably thought the "gifts" of science were wonderful and that we were heading for the promised land on a streamlined bus.

"I'm not interested in installing electric gadgets," I told him, and returned to the adulterated stuff they call food in town restaurants.

He was beginning to get peeved, the way they do when they see they aren't going to make a sale. "You aren't much in favor of progress, are you?" he asked, kind of nasty.

I sighed disgustedly and said, "Son, everybody's in favor of progress, just like everybody's against sin. It's all according to what you mean by the word. Now take automobiles..."

He sneered. "Well, they get you there quicker, and..."



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I sneered back. "And what do you do when you get there; anything worthwhile? For a hundred years people have been trying to 'get there quicker,' so busily that they haven't had time to figure out something worth doing when they arrive. Everybody is going lickity-split—and getting nowhere. These new thousand mile an hour airplanes can get anywhere on earth in twelve hours. But what's accomplished?"

He took a drink of his coffee, looking over the rim of his cup at me as though I didn't have good sense. "Among other things," he said, "it has military advantages."

I began to boil. "Makes it easier to kill folks, eh? Did it ever occur to you that if our scientists spent the time and money they did on the atom bomb on cancer research, there probably wouldn't be any cancer today?"

He didn't answer that, probably figuring I was too foolish to argue with. After awhile he got up and left.

All the way back to the farm, I worded over the things I could've said to him, pointing out where our modern trend is taking us. We've developed a tremendous science, but we've found no way to control it. Frankenstein's monster was one of these here juvenile delinquents compared to our scientific development. We're heading for complete destruction, unless a miracle comes along to save us—and I don't believe in miracles.

I WAS SO riled up that night, just thinking it over, that I didn't get to sleep until late. As a result, it was nearly dawn when I woke up, just in time to see the thing come down from the sky.

I sat up quickly in bed, thinking at first it was one of these here meteorites, but when it got closer, I could see I was wrong. Built something like a fat cigar, it was shooting fire from its fore end like a Fourth of July roman candle. It's speed was falling off quick, and, as it got nearer to the ground, it slowed up until, when it finally touched, it did so almost gentle.

It suddenly came to me that it'd landed right smack in the midst of my corn. I jumped from the bed, hurried into my trousers, and ran over to the closet for the shotgun. I rammed two buckshot shells into the breech and was out the door and started across the fields in less than a minute, half dressed and with my shoelaces trying to trip me up as I ran.

I could hear Betty and Beth stomping in terror in their stalls, and the chickens cutting up like as though there was a coyote in with them.

It was too much. I try to tell myself I don't mind other folks having their cars and their electric devices and even their airplanes, but when they seek me out on my isolated little farm, where I've tried so hard to escape the world, and land one of their fantastic new experiment rocket ships in my corn—

Sure enough, a good acre and more of my best golden bantam was nothing more than smoldering stubble. I strode through it wrathfully and pounded on what appeared like the thing's door with the butt of my gun.

I still can't say whether it would be proper to call it an airplane. It was considerable larger than any such craft I'd ever seen. But, then, I'm not much up on such things, and I understand the government is spend-


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing billions of dollars on the making of such hellish devices, and at such a rate hardly anybody can keep up with all the new flying machines.

It must've reached nearly a hundred feet into the air. Its wings, if that's what you could call them, were short and stubby. The metal—I guess it was metal—on the outside had a queer shimmering look, something like an old mirror that's had a considerable amount of the mercury stuff on its back dislocated. In spite of all the flame it had been shooting out, it didn't seem to be hot. I reached out gingerly with a finger and touched its side; it felt cool.

I thumped on the door again, still boiling mad. As poor as I am, this contraption of "progress" had to destroy more than half my sweet corn crop.

The door didn't open, and I half walked, half stumbled, around the thing. It was as big as a small barn. I couldn't help but wonder how it ever got up into the air. What a sample of man's ability! If he only was able to turn his genius to real advancement instead of these here instruments of war and uncontrolled industrial development and its natural result, international trade rivalry, depressions, and all the rest.

BY THE TIME I'd circled the big airship, the door had begun to open up, real slow. When a crack finally appeared there was a sudden whoosh of air, like as though there'd been more pressure inside than outside. I stood there watching, my shotgun under my arm, my lungs almost busting with the want to read them the riot act.

Suddenly the door swung free, and there they were, three of them staring down at me.

Maybe my scorn of men who'll make war their profession, even in times of peace, colored my outlook too much, but it seemed to me they were the most strange appearing specimens in the half light of morning that I've ever seen. Even their clothes were queer, but I guess that's due to the special uniforms aviators have to wear when they go up in these complicated new rocket airplanes. These wore the most confounded garments I ever laid eyes on.

I glared at them, real belligerent, waiting for some kind of apology. Not that I was expecting to accept it anyways. I was ready to tell them off plenty.

The first of them, the commanding officer, I guess, stared at me a full minute before saying anything. He was a tall man, not a hair on his head, and his eyes were more bright than ordinary. He looked out of place, to me, like as though he was really a dreamer, not one who'd spend his life working on rocket propelled super-bombers, to kill off his fellow man.

He said finally, "Greetings. This is Terra, is it not?"

A foreigner!

You could tell from the way he talked. He had the heaviest accent I ever heard. I've always thought it was bad enough that the government puts thousand of Americans to work figuring out new ways of killing folks, but that they should hire foreign experts also is too much.

I never heard of the town of Terra. I snorted, still holding myself in check. "This is Harvey, North Dakota, or leastways, just twenty miles out." I was about to light into them then, but they threw me off by putting their heads together and jabbering away in some foreign language.

Finally, the leader turned back to



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

me again and said, "We are from Borl, in the Aldeberan System, and bring you the greetings and well wishes of..."

It was then that I began to boil over. "So you're *all* foreigners! At first I thought you were some American experiment airplane, but now I see I was wrong. You're foreign military people, ships like this aren't ever built for peaceable purpose. You come here in your big, fast flying bomber, pretending being peaceful and friendly. Probably next year you'll come back for another visit, carrving these here atom bombs.

HE TRIED to stop me, but I went on, blood rushing to my head as I roared. "You come down blasting away with your hellish ship of destruction, scaring my stock half to death, ruining my best sweet corn, and then you have the consarned gall..."

I don't think he understood more than half of what I was yelling, but he interrupted again before I could catch my breath.

"You don't understand," he said, scowling a little bit. "We have come to give you the advice and guidance of a more advanced people..."

That was his story, but even if it was the truth and not just more of this here propaganda stuff, I was still hopping mad.

"Advice," I yelled at him. "Advice! Keep your consarned advice! I been getting more crazy advice from Washington than I know what to do with, without some wiseacre foreigners starting in. How to plant, what to plant, when to plant, how to fertilize, how to put in electricity, how to do this and that, and the other thing. And then what happens? First they teach you how to grow tremendous big crops, and then a depression comes along and they make you destroy them. How many potatoes to pour kerosene on, what crops to plow under, what pigs to shoot, what fruit trees to chop down!"

Everything of the past forty years kind of flashed in front of me. All the results of their quick growing science and their lack of knowing what to do with it. Their producing more and more products with their new machines, but not having places enough to sell it all. And the whole thing finally blowing up with wars over colonies and sources of raw materials and oil, and markets to dump their surplus manufactured goods. I thought of the loss of Johnny in the first war, and of Cris in the second, and of Ruth's death by cancer; and I knew their crazy science is still growing and growing and a sane way of using the things it discovers, is yet to be figured out. And I knew they're preparing for the next war just as fast as ever possible. Their science be hanged!

Finally I stopped for breath.

The commander of the group was beginning to get pretty pale with anger himself by this time. "Such indignity," he said. "Haven't you considered the fact that we've gone to endless difficulty in making this journey here and in studying your fantastic language by using your radio emanations? And then to land on your barbarian..."

That got me going again. I was mad, too wrought up to make sense in what I was saying, but I yelled back as loud as I could. "Fantastic language! Who told you you could talk it? It's all a man can do to understand your jibber-jabber. And what do you mean, barbarian? The real savages are you professional sol-


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

diers and you scientists who work at death dealing machines."

I realized I was talking so loud and so fast that probably he couldn't understand me, so I slowed down. *"If you don't like this country, why don't you go back where you came from?"* I yelled real clear.

HE STARED at me for a long time without saying anything. "That seems an excellent suggestion," he said finally. "Obviously, we made a mistake in coming at all." His eyes gleamed almost unhuman-like, he was so mad, and he slammed the door. I could hear the cogs working inside it again, making it air-tight.

I remembered what the blast from its exhausts, or whatever it was, had done to my corn, so I dashed back to get out of the way. A few minutes later the big airship flashed all different color flame from its bottom, and lifted sluggish-like from the ground. It gained speed slowly, then faster, then, with a roar, it streaked up and disappeared into the sky. It was a terrible thing to watch, something like a skyrocket, I thought. A youngster's toy, developed into an instrument of war that could destroy cities in a few minutes.

I plodded back to the house, exhausted; knowing myself for the old, tired, disillusioned and bitter man that I am. Only a miracle could save this world of ours from destruction—and I don't believe in miracles.

* * *

*...Unfortunately, the Aldeberan expedition was a failure, being received with open hostility and belligerence. At the time, some criticism was made of the group's leader, on the grounds that he had left Terra after being influenced adversely by but one inhabitant of the backward planet. Be that as it may, Terra was not visited again until two hundred decals later, following several atomic wars. There were no members of the species homo sapiens left by then.*

*—From the Encyclopedia Galactica*

SCIENCE FICTION•FANTASY

FANTASTIC

CLIP AND MAIL THIS MONEY-SAVING COUPON TODAY.

Enter my subscription for FANTASTIC STORIES

6 Issues only $2.50 ..... 12 Issues only $4.50 .....

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Send the following free issues .....

(Add 50¢ per year additional postage for Canada and Pan American countries; and $1 per year extra for all other foreign orders.)

Mail to: Fantastic / Box 7, Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y. 11364



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(Continued from page 5)
of the house. But most are turned off. I should know—I have three (all hand-medowns); mine are simply there for convenience's sake (the odd moment when my wife and I want to watch different programs, or one of us wants to watch something without disturbing the other). We watch tv a few hours each week. We might watch more often, if there was more worth watching. (I'm not one of those tv snobs who refuses to believe any intelligent fare gets broadcast; just today there was a Cousteau movie on underwater exploration, "Twenty-First Century" on present-day robots, "Wild Kingdom" on a year in the life of otters, a David Frost "Special" of genuine humor imported from England, etc. I'm glad I had a chance to see them and I enjoyed them.)

I was not a big fan of the Smothers Brothers show, but I watched it occasionally. As a jazz and rock enthusiast, I enjoyed the occasional groups and singers who were shown. Some, like Jackie & Roy, have rarely if ever been on national television before—and it was long overdue. Joan Baez has a sizeable following (I am not a part of it myself), and *she* is a rarity on network television. Clearly a great many intelligent, responsible tastes are being ignored. I doubt we'll *ever* see the Mothers of Invention on tv.

The youth today knows this. Although they buy millions of records, they rarely see the musicians they like on television except in laundered versions, and then only briefly. And they know why—or think they do. The "Establishment" is suppressing rock music, along with marijuana, healthy sex, and open discussion of unpopular subjects (like racial strife, Vietnam, and the manipulation of our "democratic" processes, as well as drugs and sex). The "Establishment" is the "They" on the other side of thirty—the wrong side of the generation gap. The "Establishment" is repressive, entrenched, status-quo-seeking, rigid, and mostly old. The "Establishment" is CBS.

And the "Establishment" has made Tom and Dick Smothers into Culture Heroes, when in actuality they have been rather timid spokesmen for youth-oriented subjects and are themselves much closer to the wrong side of thirty.

So here we are, fantasy people living in the science-fictional world of tomorrow, today. But I'm more pesimistic than Terry Carr. I see people pushing open doors, broadening horizons, bringing light in where none was ever shed before, and while I want to applaud it, I am apprehensive. I think the forces of reaction and ignorance are gathering. I think that we stand now in a perilous place. It may well be that the cancelation of the Smothers Brothers was an opening salvo, a tentative finger to the wind, before the main battle is joined to close those doors, shrink those horizons, turn out the lights, and take us back into a cultural Dark Age modelled on the Victorian Era.

The danger is this: we are all only individuals better and worse, but collectively we are weaker, more ignorant, and far more short-sighted than our mean. As individuals we want and believe in peace, love, fellowship and brotherhood. As groups we actively oppose these things because they appear to threaten us.

How many of you, like me over thirty, read reports of the sexual revolution supposedly taking place today among the young, and both envy and hate them for it? We're already married,


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

aren't we? We had to grope, blindly, for what fragmented truths we could discover about the opposite sex, and how we could relate to them.

*Why should the kids get it all for free?* Right? Why should they have something denied to us?

Prosperous-looking men in their fifties stand in lines in the stores which sell pornography, thumbing the books. Many scan racks which show photo-magazines of teen-aged boys and girls in the nude, and books about incest and teen sex sell like hotcakes to these men.

*How many would have a fit if he discovered his own teenaged son or daughter was sleeping with someone?*

The older generation was taught to repress its feelings by a previous, equally repressed generation. It's self-perpetuating. But it makes emotional cripples of us all. Are we to wish ill-health on our children because *we* endured it?

Too many people in this country will.

Recently in the news was the case of a school teacher in a highschool who wrote a very common four-letter Word on her blackboard and asked her English class to discuss it. She had been disturbed at the frequency with which it was showing up on the school's restroom walls (and one presumes she had been only in the *girls'* restrooms). She brought it out into the open.

Her reward was both prosecution (on criminal charges) and persecution from the town fathers. To the man, they accused her of thrusting this Word—this so very common Word—upon the innocent minds of their children. O pious hypocrisy!

I learned that Word before I could spell it, and long before I could appreciate its meaning—and from my peers. We all knew it, used it, giggled over it, and kept it hidden from our sexless and innocent parents. I cannot imagine very many people in this country have not shared my experience in its broadest outlines. The Word is ubiquitous.

Today's youth wants to know why this Word—and the act it represents—must be hidden with shame, heaped with repression, and made filthy. It is one of the oldest words in the English language, after all, represents the basic procreative function of our race, and deserves, one might think, a certain honest respect.

But we play games. We pretend it, and all it stands for, do not exist. We play the game of Distrust. We tell our children, White is Black. And, oddly, they no longer believe us.

It is my firm conviction that science fiction and fantasy transcend age barriers—that there is much we can do and are doing to bridge the gap and build trust between us. That is why I address myself to this subject.

We extrapolate a thousand tomorrows, and we counsel an open mind to everyone. We speculate on the improbable, and dare the impossible.

Perhaps universal brotherhood is impossible. General sanity and good mental health for all may be improbable. But if we as individuals can contribute to these goals by maintaining flexible, questing, understanding, growing minds, we owe it not only to our descendants but to outselves to attempt no less. We must oppose hypocrisy where we see it, and champion trust over distrust.

Easy words to say, and hard words to live by—no one knows that more than I—and yet, can we settle for less?

* * *

FANTASTIC has been, in recent



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

years, a poor relation to its sister magazine, AMAZING. Its sales have been lower and it has generated less reader-response, if the letters we receive are any indication. We'd like to reverse that trend, if we can. Beginning this issue we bring back the letters column, *According to You,* in what I hope is a temporarily less-than-average length. It's been my theory that readers don't, as a rule, write letters to magazines which don't print letters. We want your letters—not simply for the letters column, but—more importantly—in order to find out what you think of what we're doing with FANTASTIC, how you like the stories and features, and what you'd like to see added to these pages. I want to build FANTASTIC into a magazine as good as, but different from, AMAZING—a "separate but equal" magazine which earns as loyal support from its readers. *You* are the readers. You tell me how to do it. Please write me a letter—use the address at the head of the letters column to reach me most quickly—and write it today.

—Ted White

(Continued from page 109)

never die.

Bryce Thompson

*In reply to you both, I should mention that Lin Carter is working up a new sword-and-sorcery series for us, and there is the possibility of a de Camp-Carter Conan story in the future as well. However,* good *s-and-s fiction is hard to come by these days—the people who seem to enthuse over it the most seem to write it the least well, at least to judge by the submissions I've seen. What we would very much like is to publish good, strong, well-written adventure-fantasy, but no one seems to be writing it, at least for magazine publication. In the meantime, we'll continue to just struggle along with good fantasies of other types, as best we can. —TW*

Gentlemen:

Upon reading Vol. 18, No. 4, April issue of FANTASTIC, I find it unnecessarily disgusting.

"How Now Purple Cow" by Bill Pronzini, was not fit to be published. Gathering from what I read, I find that the writer of such an article must be suffering from mental deficiency. *("How Now Purple Cow" was a story, not an article. —TW)*

"The Brain Surgeon," by Robin Schaefer, was acceptable but far from science fiction. *(FANTASTIC is a* fantasy *magazine. —TW)*

"The Monster," by John Sladek, is an unforgivable disgrace to science fiction. *(See above. —TW)* Mr. Sladek surely is a lunatic and should be placed in front of a firing squad.

After reading garbage of this sort I find also that you have offended my standards of decency and demand immediate apologies for publishing repulsive rot.

I am thankful that I am immune to such treacherous trash.

I would like to mention what I think you should do with this book but I am unable to do so as my letters are censored.

Being a reader of FANTASTIC, I'm sure that you will want my comment on your next issue.

Kindly send refund on this one.

Robert Levine

Censored, Palm Beach County Jail

*I guess we should all be grateful you are not in a position to put your unique form of criticism (firing squads and all) into effect. I suggest you reflect upon the message in my editorial this issue and consider a more charitable view towards the men who write for this (or any) magazine. —TW*



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# THE UNTHINKING DESTROYER

## by ROG PHILLIPS

**Gordon and Harold both admitted the possibility of thinking entities other than human. But would they ever recognize the physical form of some of these beings?**

"HEY, Gordon!"

Gordon Marlow, Ph.D., straightened up and turned in the direction of the voice, the garden trowel dangling in his dirt-stained white canvas glove. His wide mouth broke into a smile that revealed even white teeth. It was Harold Harper, an undergraduate student, who had called.

"Hop over the fence and come in," Gordon invited.

He dropped the trowel and, taking off his work gloves, reached into his pocket and extracted an old pipe. He filled it, the welcoming smile remaining on his lips, while Harold Harper approached, stepping carefully between the rows of carrots, cabbages, and cauliflower.

Harold held a newspaper in his hand. When he reached Gordon Marlow he held it open and pointed to the headline. ROBOT ROCKET SHIP TO MARS.

Gordon took the paper and read the item, puffing slowly and contentedly on his old pipe. His eyes took on an interested look when he came to the reporter's speculations on the possibility of intelligent life on Mars.

Finally he handed the newspaper back to Harold.

"You know, Harold," he said, "I wonder if they would recognize intelligent life if they saw it on other planets."

"Of course they would," Harold replied. "Regardless of its form there would be artifacts that only intelligent life could create."

"Would there?" Gordon snorted. "I wonder."

He squatted down, picking up the trowel and lazily poking it into the rich soil at his feet.

"That's why I wonder," he continued. "We are so prone to set up tests on what intelligent life is that we are likely to miss it entirely if it doesn't conform exactly to our preconceived notions. We assume that if a being is intelligent it must get the urge to build artifacts of some kind—pots and vases, houses, idols, machinery, metal objects. But MUST it? In order to do so it must have hands and perhaps legs. Suppose it doesn't have such things? Suppose that no matter how intelligent it might be, it could not do those things!"

"Then it wouldn't be intelligent, would it?" Harold asked, puzzled.

"We are assuming it is," Gordon said patiently. "There are other out-

Copyright 1948 by Ziff-Davis Publishing Co.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lets for intelligence than making clay pots. As a last resort for an intelligent being there is always—thinking."

He chuckled at his joke.

"I've often wondered what it would be like to be a thinking, reasoning being with no powers of movement whatsoever. With bodily energy provided automatically by environment, say, and all the days of life with nothing to do but think. What a chance for a philosopher! What depths of thought he might explore. What heights of intellectual perception he might attain. And if there were some means of contact with others of his kind, so that all could pool their thoughts and guide the younger generation, what progress such a race might make!"

"AND so we see," Ont telepathed, "that there must be a Whole of which each of us is a part only. The old process which says 'I think, therefore I am,' has its fallacy in the statement, 'I think.' It assumes that that assertion is axiomatic and basic, when in reality it is the conclusion derived from a long process of mental introspection. It is a theory rather than an axiom."

"But don't you think, Ont," Upt replied, "that you are confusing the neumenon with the phenomenon? What I mean is, the fact of thinking is there from the very start or the conclusion couldn't be reached; and the theoretical conclusion, as you call it, is merely the final recognition of something basic and axiomatic that was there all the time!"

"True," Ont replied. "But still, to the thinking mind, it is a theory and not an axiom. All neumena are there before we arrive at an understanding of them. Thought, if it exists as such, is also there. But the theoretical conclusion I think has no more degree of certainty than any other thing the mind can deal with. To say 'I think' is to assert the truth of an hypothesis which MAY be true, but not necessarily so. And then to conclude, 'Therefore I am,' is to advance one of the most shaky conclusions of all time. Underneath that so-called logical conclusion lies a metaphysics of being, a theory of Wholes, a recognition by differentiation of parts, with a denial of all but the one part set apart by that differentiation, and, in short, the most irrational hodgepodge of contradictory conclusions the thinking mind can conceive. This pre-cognition that enables one to arrive at the tenuous statement, 'I think, therefore I am,' is nicely thrown out by tagging it with another metaphysical intangible called illusion—as if the mind can separate illusion from reality by some absolute standard."

"I believe you're right, Ont," Upt replied slowly, his telepathed thoughts subdued with respect. "It is possible that the concept, 'I think,' is the illusion, while the so-called illusions are the reality."

"EVEN without the benefit of past thoughts," Gordon was saying, whacking off a weed a yard away and nearly upsetting himself, "a mind with nothing to do but think could accomplish miracles. Suppose it was not aware of any other thinking entity, though it might be surrounded by such similar entities. It would be born or come into existence some way, arrive at self awareness and certain other awarenesses to base its thinking on, depending on its structure, and—" he looked up at Harold startled at his own conclusion—"it might even arrive at the ultimate solution to all reality and comprehend the foundations of the Universe!"

"And eventually be destroyed with-


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

out any other entity having the benefit of it all," Harold commented dryly.

"What a pity that would be," Gordon murmured. "For the human race to struggle for hundreds of years, and have some unguessable entity on Mars do all that in one lifetime—and it all go to waste while some blundering ass lands on Mars and passes it by, looking for artifacts."

"BUT that is only the start in the blunders contained in that most profound philosophical revelation of old," Ont stated. "After arriving at a precarious conclusion about existence the ancients were not satisfied. They had to say, 'If I am I must have been created!' Then they go on and say, 'If I was created there must be a Creator!' And thus they soar from their precarious perch in existence, soar on nonexistent wings, and perch on the essence of evanescence! They do not recognize the alternative—that to exist does not necessarily imply a beginning. They do not recognize it because they have derived all their tools from reality around them and then denied the reality while accepting the validity of the tools of thought derived from it. And in this way they arrive at an absolute existence of Something they have never sensed or felt in any way, while denying all that they have felt and sensed, and give it attributes which their sense of idealism dictates it must have, and call it God."

"Then," Upt said thoughtfully, "I take it you are an atheist?"

"Certainly NOT," Ont growled telepathically.

"But you implied that in your comments on the conclusions of the ancients," Upt insisted.

"BUT if there are no artifacts," Harold said. "And no signs of intelligence whatever, how could we ever know that there WAS intelligence some place?"

"There must be some way," Gordon said. "I've taught logic at the U for fifteen years now, and I've done a lot of thinking on the subject. If we ever reach Mars I think we should be very careful what we touch. We would be clumsy bulls in a china shop, not knowing the true worth of what we found, destroying what might be found to be priceless by later and more careful explorers. Mars is older than the Earth, and I can't help being convinced that there is SOME form of intelligence there."

"I IMPLIED no such thing as atheism," Ont insisted. "I merely said that the reasoning used by the ancients to arrive at the Creator was the most slipshod and illogical possible. There was another line used long ago that was more solid, but still very weak. It started out with the statement, 'I can be aware of nothing but thoughts. External stimuli, if such there are, must be transformed into thought before I can be aware of them. Since I can never be aware of anything other than thought, why assume anything except thought exists? You, and all other things, exist as thoughts in my mind. There is nothing except what exists in my mind. Therefore, by that token, *I* am God!"

"But," Upt chuckled, "by the same token I can insist that *I* am God and you are just a product of my own creation."

"Yes," Ont agreed. "So it presents a dilemma. To resolve it, it is necessary to postulate a Supreme Mind, and to say that all things are just thoughts in God's Mind. That makes us both the same then and there is no argument about who is God!"


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

HAROLD kicked a lump of moist earth absently

"It seems to me, Gordon," he said cautiously, "that you are biting the air with your teeth. If there are intelligent beings on Mars they will be aware of us, and make themselves known. If for no other reason they will do that to keep us from destroying them."

Gordon stood up and arched his back. He placed the garden trowel and gloves in the hip pocket of his coveralls and tapped his pipe on the heel of his shoe.

"You are assuming," he said, "that such beings can find a way to communicate with us. But have you thought of the possibility that if their abilities to reason are undetectable to us, by the same token they might not be aware we are intelligent? A mad bull in a pasture can think after a fashion, but would you try to reason with him? You would run if he charged you, and if he caught up with you and mauled you it would never occur to you to say, 'Look here, old boy. Let's talk this thing over first.' "

Both men laughed. Gordon started walking along the row he was standing in, toward the house. Harold kept pace.

"I see your point," he agreed.

"There are so many things we assume unconsciously when we speculate on the possibilities of intelligent life on Mars," Gordon went on, stooping over to pull a weed he had missed in his earlier weeding. "Rate of thinking is most probably a function of the material organism. Some other thinking creature might think faster or slower—perhaps so much so that we couldn't follow them even if we could tune in on their thoughts directly. Imagine a mind so ponderous that it takes a year for it to think as much as we do in a minute! Speed wouldn't necessarily have to be a function of size, either. Something incredibly small might take ages to think a simple thought. Have you ever heard the German tale called The Three Sleepers, Harold?"

"No, I haven't," Harold replied.

"WELL, in a small town in Germany there were three men so fat that they could barely walk. They spent nearly all their time sleeping. The only trouble was that every day or so someone would disturb them by singing or walking by, or some other trivial thing that is always happening in a small town, no matter how dead it is.

"One time when they were disturbed three days running they got mad and decided to go to the hills. They looked in the hills until they found a nice dry cave. There they relaxed with deep sighs of contentment and went to sleep. Day after day, week after week, they slept undisturbed.

"Then one day a dog wandered into the cave, saw the three breathing mountains of flesh and heard the din of their deep snoring; and, scared half to death, let out a shrill yip and skedaddled.

"A week later one of the three sleepers stirred, opened his eyes briefly, and muttered, 'What was that noise?' Then he promptly went back to sleep.

"Ten days later the second sleeper stirred, muttered, 'Damfino,' and went back to sleep.

"Nearly a month later the third sleeper opened his eyes suddenly, stared at the roof of the cave for a moment, and said, 'I think it was a dog.' Then he went back to sleep. The way the story goes nothing ever came near the cave again, so they are still there, fast asleep—still fat, too,


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I suppose."

"I see what you're driving at," Harold said, chuckling over the story. "We assume that any intelligent being whatever, if it exists, thinks at the same RATE we do; but it might not."

"That's right," Gordon admitted. "And there are even more subtle assumptions we make unconsciously. For one, we assume that a thinking creature must think in the same way we do. We might not even be able to recognize thinking when we meet it, on another planet. No—" he held up his hand to silence the question on Harold's lips, "—I don't know exactly what I mean. I'll put it this way. We have steam engines and gasoline engines. We also have electric motors. Suppose we have steam-engine thought. How would we recognize electric motor thinking?

"Or perhaps a little closer to what I'm trying to express, we have arithmetic and algebra. Suppose with our arithmetic minds with no slightest inkling of the existence of a variable, we run into an algebra mind? We might mistake it for something far removed from thinking or intelligence. We go on the assumption that anything that doesn't stomp up, give a salute, and solemnly announce 'How', is unintelligent."

"It might just be more interested in its own thoughts than in the visitors from Earth," Harold suggested.

"It might," Gordon said. "Or it might be intensely curious and studying the Earthmen very closely with senses other than sight and hearing."

"BUT," Ont added thoughtfully, "although the conclusion that we are all thoughts in the mind of the Creator is logically unshakeable, it isn't very satisfying, from a logical point, because it makes God nothing more than the compromising of a cute dilemma. It places the Creator in the same light as the final decision to locate the Capitol of the United States at Washington."

"Where's that?" Upt asked quickly.

"I don't know," Ont said testily. "That's just something I picked up out of the blue, so to speak. Inspirational thought. For all I know it's just a figment of my imagination."

"I've had inspirational thoughts too," Upt said excitedly. "I haven't spoken of them to you because I was afraid you might think I was becoming disorganized in my thoughts."

"I've done a lot of thinking about the inspirational stuff I get now and then," Ont said matter-of-factly. "If it came all the time I would be inclined to think it was the Voice of the Supreme Being Itself! But it doesn't come that way."

"Neither does mine," Upt said. "I often think there must be angels that hover over us at times and bless us with their wise thoughts, perhaps looking into us to see if we are 'ready' yet. When I seem to sense these powerful thoughts about me I try to feel humble and worshipful. I hope in that way one of them will see fit to reveal himself to me someday."

"They might," Ont said hopefully. "I wouldn't mind actually talking to one of them myself. But speaking of that, we don't know for sure that these inspirational thoughts aren't actually our own. They SEEM different, but that may be because they arise in some part of our deep subconscious thought processes. I've been trying to extend my sense of awareness in order to reach into my subconscious mind and actually plumb it to its depths. One thing I've found is that most of my REAL thinking goes on there, and only rises to the surface of consciousness when it is completed! That lends probability to


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the theory that ALL such voices of inspiration are merely my own subconscious mind giving me the end products of carefully thought out trains of reasoning it had dreamed up."

"I think I'll try that line of development myself," Upt said. "I'd never thought of it. Maybe inspiration is only subconscious thought rising to the surface of consciousness. Maybe it is. But if so, I'll be very disappointed. I'd hoped sometime to be able to commune with some intelligence infinitely superior to mine and really learn the true nature of things."

"I SINCERELY hope I'm wrong about it," Ont said. "I too would like to believe that there is more in reality than just us. I wonder if other kinds of entities are possible? I mean thinking beings with different forms, different senses, perhaps different types of thinking. It may be they exist and we aren't equipped to detect them. They may be around us all the time, aware of us and our puerile thoughts, but so superior to us in every way that they don't think it worth while even to consider our feeble cogitations."

"I wouldn't call YOUR cogitations feeble, Ont," Upt exclaimed admiringly.

"That is a point of relativity," Ont said, somewhat flattered. "It does seem in vain, though. We spend our existence in solving the problems of reality, and when we have solved them we have no need of the solution. It gives us a feeling of satisfaction to gain the theoretical basis of reality from our point of view. But I for one would feel much better if we could be of service to some entity who is unable to accomplish that himself, but might be able to comprehend it if we taught him."

"All very noble," Upt said skeptically. "But I can't even imagine a thinking creature different from us in any way."

"That's why it's so difficult," Ont said. "In our own minds we tend to become absolute rather than relative in our conceptions. Some other entity might, for example, think much more slowly than we, or with incredible rapidity, so that our thoughts would be sluggish to him, or so swift that he would never be able to grasp them until long after we were gone.

"Also, we tend to think that thought as we experience it, is the only possible type of thought. In reality there may be others. Different mental principles. Different material structure. Perhaps concepts outside our ability to grasp, while ours might be outside the ability of such creatures to grasp also."

"I don't believe I grasp what you're trying to say," Upt hesitated.

"Well, put it this way," Ont said patiently. "All things are relative. Why not thought? It might be possible to have two thinking minds which are relatively non-thinking. Each, from EVERY standard of the other, being totally thoughtless and without intelligence or mind."

"Now you're going too far," Upt said. "Thought is thought, I think, and—it's real. If any other entity thinks, its thinking must be real too."

"Of course," Ont murmured. "You miss the point entirely. If from every possible angle, some entity, to YOU, can't think and doesn't, it is non-thinking and unintelligent. Right?"

GORDON and Harold paused at the edge of the garden.

"Nice crop of vegetables you have there, Gordon," Harold said appreciatively.

"Thanks," Gordon said. "Say, wouldn't your wife like some fresh vegtables?"


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# FANTASY BOOKS

## TWO FROM ENGLAND

SUB ROSA: Strange Tales, by Robert Aickman, Gollancz, London, 1968

Lovecraft once wrote, "All that a wonder story can ever be is a vivid picture of a certain type of human mood."

This makes me wonder just what conceivable human moods Lovecraft himself meant to convey by a pink Plutonian sneaking through the Vermont woods with several living human and non-human brains in shiny metal cylinders tucked in the crook of his batlike wings ("The Whisperer in Darkness") or by a barn-size monster composed of living rope writhing on a Massachusetts hilltop and bellowing, "Father!" ("The Dunwich Horror"). A weariness with unemotional, brain-capturing intellectuality? Dread of encapsulating love? And the grandiose tantrums of babyhood?

But if Lovecraft's dictum can only with great straining be applied to his own stories ("The Silver Key" is one notable exception with its portrayal of a traditionalist's outlook), it nicely fits the weird tales of Robert Aickman, the most determined creator of such fiction in England today, with two other collections already to his credit—*Dark Entries* and *Powers of Darkness.*

For in Aickman's stories the focus is almost always on the central character rather than on the eerie phenomena he or she encounters. He writes about lonely and alienated people, retired schoolteachers, people in the fringes of the worlds of art and publishing, people enduring "that cursed and special boredom of middle married life." The weird things that happen to them emphasize, adumbrate, or put a final and sometimes deadly seal on their personal troubles, rather than rousing fear or eerie expectancy in the reader.

The only story in this lot that awakened and sustained in me a feeling of supernatural dread was "The Houses of the Russians," and that is an exception to the other tales in that it is not the mood and life-point of the central character that brings a weird horror down on him; he is simply the uninvolved narrator, as is the central character in most of the stories of M. R. James, and indeed there are several effective Jamesian touches in this tale, as, "At the best of times, to pass by a lot of empty houses is a sad proceeding. It makes you think all the wrong thoughts."

Aickman writes carefully, restrainedly, with a commendable seriousness, and in a leisurely British fashion, often devoting pages to the description of a person or the setting of a scene. His closest literary forebear appears to be Walter de la Mare, whose short stories in *The Riddle, The Connoisseur,* and *On the Edge* depict various human moods, sometimes of dread or wonder, sometimes ambiguous and puzzling.

It is the rationale or source of the weird phenomena in Aickman's stories that is hardest to define. I don't get the impression that the characters generally are psychopathic or are having hallucinations, though such factors may play a part. Nor does Aickman provide a


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

consistent psychic, pseudo-scientific, religious, or folklore background for his eerie happenings, even in that broad fashion in which all of M. R. James' tales might be considered one vast footnote to Shakespeare's epitaph, "Curst be he who moves my bones." No, Aickman's vary from legends and mythic recurrences to modern obsessions, and the reader must take them on faith and on the power of Aickman's writing—something I am prepared to do rather less than fifty percent of the time.

Perhaps this isn't bad shooting in the realm of horror, since human dreads are widely various and highly individual. In her big *Omnibus of Crime* (1929), which made many Americans conscious for the first time of the scope of the supernatural story, Dorothy Sayers picks at least four tales featuring moronic ghosts: James' "Martin's Close," Robert Hichens' "How Love Came to Professor Guildea," Machen's "The Black Seal" with its mentally retarded Jervase Cradock, and Conrad's "The Brute." The combination of the spectral and the subnormal had a special terror for her. And perhaps for the materialist or skeptic, supernatural horror can only mean irrational horror.

Nevertheless, for a story that is not to be pure psychopathology, I want more than simply the given (This is my horror, the writer says, take it or leave it). I want some powerful suggestion that there has been a suspension of natural law, an intrusion of outer forces that amounts to more than a kink in the human brain.

NEGATIVES, by Peter Everett, Simon and Schuster, 1965.

This interesting thriller indirectly involves the British hyoscine-murderer Dr. Crippen and the German air-killer Baron von Richthofen. Peter Everett is a master of the topography of doleful bathrooms and dismal people and he effectively uses shocks that are chiefly in the sexual fringes. The first two thirds of the story move slowly, but the last third mounts steadily to a smashing climax.

I might not include this novel here, except that The Manchester Guardian calls it "a variation on the theme of identity," the blurb hints that the characters aren't perhaps who we think they are, and even the last page of the book belatedly introduces a metaphysical mystery that—I ask the author's pardon—simply isn't there.

This is clearly the story of three fringe-psychopaths, one of whom is adept at pushing the buttons of the other two. It succeeds quite well enough just as that and neither requires nor is helped by suggestions—again pardon me, Peter Everett—that something deeper (and more literarily respectable?) may be stirring. A character who *thinks* he is Napoleon and one who in some sense *is* Napoleon are two very different sorts of character and belong in two very different sorts of books.

I detest attempts to pretty up a melodrama or a story of insanity by hinting at metaphysical mysteries. Take note, even Duerrenmatt! Fiction should be a self-explanatory art, and I hate to see it burdened and camouflaged like much modern visual art by critics, exploiters, and even overambitious creators, who see or tack on deep philosophic implications where there are none. Occam's razor has its uses in art as well as science.

—*Fritz Leiber*



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

## THREE FROM LANKHMAR

SWORDS IN THE MIST, SWORDS AGAINST WIZARDRY, and THE SWORDS OF LANKHMAR, by Fritz Leiber, Ace, 1968, 60 cents each

Leiber tells me that these three books about his pair of heroic rogues are respectively numbers 3, 4, and 5 chronologically in their saga, taking up the tale when they are in the prime of their manhood, or a little beyond it, and suffering from money troubles and a consciousness of "the world's slow stain." In "The Cloud of Hate" and "Lean Times in Lankhmar," which begin *Swords in the Mist,* they are stony broke and briefly seek escape from the endless cycle of their adventurings, the Gray Mouser by becoming an extortionist's lieutenant, Fafhrd by going religious.

The author also assures me that he is now at work on the first two volumes of the saga, which tell about his heroes' youths, how they met, and how they became involved with their sorcerous guides and tormentors, Ningauble of the Seven Eyes and Sheelba of the Eyeless Face. These two projected books will contain the early stories collected in the Gnome volume *Two Sought Adventure* (1957) but also three long new yarns. The five books won't end the saga, but they'll fill up the gaps and put it in proper sequence.

And it's about time, I say, that Leiber is setting his Fafhrd-Mouser house in order after all these years—30 to be precise, for "The Jewels in the Forest," then titled "Two Sought Adventure," first appeared in the magazine, UNKNOWN in August, 1939, and was his first published story. This ought to establish some sort of long-distance record; by contrast, Robert E. Howard created all his Conan tales in the last five years of his short life. It helps account for Leiber's variations in style, from the short sentences and snappy action of "Thieves' House" to the embellished structure of "Adept's Gambit" and the sardonic humors and mock scholarship of "Lean Times."

These tales of swords and sorcery in the mythical land of Lankhmar and world of Nehwon have found four chief publishing havens over the years: John W. Campbell's short-lived fantasy magazine, UNKNOWN, August Derleth's Arkham House, FANTASTIC under the brilliant editorship of Cele Goldsmith (now Laly), and at last Ace.

It is probably a good thing that Leiber launched these stories in UNKNOWN, where he benefitted from Campbell's seasoned writing experience and had to give his tales action-adventure frameworks. Next Arkham House went out on a short limb to publish "Adept's Gambit," first of the tales to be written, in the Leiber collection *Night's Black Agents* (1947).

Then the two characters pretty much languished for twelve years. Leiber wrote "Lean Times in Lankhmar" out of nostalgia, he tells me, and was startled when Cele Goldsmith grabbed it for an all-Leiber issue of FANTASTIC, but this sale led to a new cycle of storytelling which has continued down to the present.

What seems to make the Fafhrd-Mouser stories stand out is that the two heroes are cut down to a plausible size without loss of romance and a believed-in eerie, sorcerous atmosphere and with a welcome departure from formula. They are neither physical supermen of the caliber of Conan and John Carter, nor moral or metaphysical giants like


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Tolkien's Strider, etc., and Moorcock's Elric. They win out by one quarter brains, another quarter brawn, and at least fifty percent sheer luck. They have an engaging self-interest, blind spots and vices, a gallantry of sorts, and an ability to laugh at themselves—even if the Mouser occasionally finds the last quite galling. Ones first impression may be that the Mouser is the darkly clever comedian and Fafhrd the somewhat stupid straight man, or Fafhrd the hero and the Mouser the comic relief, but a little reading reveals the self-infatuation underlying and sometimes tripping the Mouser's cunning, and also the amiable wisdom that now and then shows through Fafhrd's lazy complacency.

The literary background of the stories is mixed: One spots the influence of a whole spectrum of writers from Cabell to Howard—traces of Lord Dunsany, Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith, Talbot Mundy, the Flaubert of *Salammbo,* and the Richard Garnett who wrote the tales making up *The Twilight of the Gods.*

*Swords in the Mist* comprises "The Cloud of Hate;" "Lean Times in Lankhmar," a satire of competing religions and of men grasping at security by the various ways of money, power, asceticism, and strong drink—philosophically the most searching of all the stories; "When the Sea-King's Away," which manages some mighty strange tricks with water; "Adept's Gambit," where Ningauble time-travels the two adventurers to a destiny in the historical Seleucid empire; and two new but very short bridging episodes.

*Swords Against Wizardry,* besides two light short stories, contains the two most fully fleshed adventures in the series, short novels both: "Stardock" and "The Lords of Quarmall." The first records the climbing of a wizard-guarded Nehwonian Everest; Leiber provides a map of the mountain and an epic of fantasy mountaineering embellished with gnomes, an engaging ice-cat, monsters seen and unseen, and two invisible but highly erotic witch-girls. The second is of special interest as 10,000 of its 35,000 words were written by Harry Otto Fischer, who originated and helped shape the characters of Fafhrd and the Mouser, but except in this one instance never had a hand in the plotting or writing of the stories. Leiber tells me that the chief Fischer sections in "Quarmall," written over 30 years ago, are the scenes featuring the brothers Hasjarl and Gwaay and their father Quarmal up to the announcement of the death of the last; Ningauble's notes on the history of Quarmall; the impressive funeral-pyre scene; and the Mouser's attempted spell-casting.

One must admit that the trio of villains in this tale have an earthy malevolence that Leiber seldom if ever equals in his independent writings.

*The Swords of Lankhmar* is a novel telling of the war between Lankhmar-Above-Ground and the city of intelligent rats which underlies it. A quarter of the story recounts the first battle, fought aboard a fleet of grain ships, and was published in FANTASTIC as "Svylla's Daughter." The rest is all new and takes the reader to such places as the Sinking Land, the Great Salt Marsh, and the region of the Ghouls, as well as down into the fascinatingly detailed and malodorous rat metropolis—an evil "Wind in the Willows" world—with the Mouser for guide, reduced to rat size by a novel mass-change magic.

*—Francis Lathrop*


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Continued from page 55

wouldn't be able to recognize the world of 1988 if we were transported there now; the revolution has *that* much potential.

Oh, the "New Wave"? I said earlier that I think it's an outmoded concept already; what did I mean? Simply this: The "New Wave," as best it could be defined by those either in favor or opposed to it, was a matter of experimental styles and constructions, sometimes of attempts at new subjects. But that's all superficial, symptomatic. What's happening now, what the "New Wave" began, is a new consciousness, more flexible attitudes, a realization that science fiction has come alive again as a possible contributing force to changing the future. I think a lot of us lost that hope when sf's warnings about the Bomb failed to stop anything and when our pet, space flight, became a political propaganda tool, bread and circuses. It seemed for a while that we were on the wrong track, and maybe we were; at any rate, when sf's writers and readers show (as we are showing) that we're in tune with the very real and very important changes that are reshaping our environment and us, then it seems to me our old sense of lasting excitement must come back. I know it has for me.

And you know?—it feels exactly like the sense of wonder.

—Terry Carr

*"A Modest Manifesto" appeared first in WARHOON #26, copyright 1969 by Richard Bergeron. Bergeron publishes WARHOON on a quarterly basis, and his usual list of contributors include Harry Warner, Walter A. Willis, Bob Shaw, Robert A. W. Lowndes, James Blish and Walter Breen, as well as Terry Carr and various other minor luminaries like Robert Bloch. Sample copies may be obtained from Richard Bergeron, 11 East 68th St., New York, N.Y. 10021, for 60¢ apiece.*

*Terry Carr is perhaps more widely known these days as an editor at Ace Books (he is responsible for the Ace S.F. Specials) and the editor of several anthologies, as well as the author of such short stories as "Hopfriend" and "The Dance of the Changer and the Three," but he has been an active member of sf fandom since 1949, and has won considerable repute for his fan publications and writings.* —TW

ATTENTION ALL MAGAZINE RETAILERS

FANTASTIC is pleased to announce a Retail Display Plan available to all retailers earning a display allowance. To obtain details and a copy of the formal contract, please write to Ultimate Publishing Co., Inc., 69-62 230th Street, Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y. 11364. Under the Retail Display Plan, in consideration of your acceptance and fulfillment of the terms of the formal contract to be sent to you upon your request, you will receive a display allowance of 10 percent of the cover price per copy sold by you. This plan will become effective with all issues of FANTASTIC delivered to you subsequent to the date your written acceptance of the Agreement is received and accepted.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Continued from page 99

FIVE low, artificial, earthen mounds provided the official entrance to Masha Land, an underground city. An arched opening in the center mound was just large enough for these two wayfarers from the sky to enter—on their hands and knees. The twelve or fifteen Mashas followed them in, and that was that. I was left to wonder what it was all about.

I can't say why I crawled back to the sleeping pig at the edge of the pool, unless it was because my appetite was rising. But as I was approaching, I looked back to the fortress mountains to see that the other part of this weird world had also taken notice of the new arrivals.

A squadron of fifteen planes roared out of the mountain and began to fly up and down the valley. The show was running true to form, I thought. Whoever had come in today's windfall, the fortress meant to get in on its share of the gleanings. That was how it had happened before: the scientists had sent out a search party to pick up the pieces—and also to reconvert into their human forms any newly formed specimens who weren't interesting enough in their design to deserve a place in Dr. Hunt's museum.

On this search, someone—or rather, *something*—was soon spotted. I wished I had got there in time to see what sort of monstrosity it was. But one of the planes had already circled down to fly over within a few feet of the surface of a stream of water. Out went a package of yellow powders. Pwoof! A small explosion of dust and steam!

Flora Hessel should have been here to see, I thought. This was exactly the way it had happened to her.

When the cloud cleared, the subject walked out in his normal human form—a fine looking specimen of a man.

The blimp came over, then, and a basket was dropped for the fellow. He finally got in, under protest. I could see that he didn't want the rescuers to know that he had had other plans. Obviously he had meant to find his way into the camp of the Mashas.

All of which meant that this particular party of earth men had come with a special purpose that had something to do with the Mashas. The scientists up in the mountains had better beware.

Once again I hurried back to the sleepy, grunting beast that I had left at the edge of a pool. As an officer, he wouldn't be taken over by the search squadron too easily, I thought.

But it happened that the planes didn't spot him. Their pygmy enemies got to him first. They came on him with *zeego* guns.

Once again, I thought that Flora Hassel should have been here to see, for she had also been the target of *zeego* fire.

Flash-flash-flash!

I held back, hardly breathing. Was it going to work again? Yes, it was happening. The three pygmies approached cautiously, then more confidently.

*He was changing.*

From grunting pork chops into a muttering officer! The transformation took place as swiftly as grease melts in a hot pan.

He was evidently the same officer. He had lost a share of his dignity with the loss of his clothes; but he was the same in his mannerisms, as soon as the pygmies had offered him a wrap to throw around his body. They were welcoming him, calling him by name, asking him whether he felt okay. They found him bewildered and a trifle uncertain of his directions. He wanted to consult a map from the clothing that he had lost, but when he examined the scraps he found everything too nearly



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

demolished to be of any service. He placed his faith in the pygmies, then, and they conducted him away toward the five-mound entrance.

I drew a deep breath. My serpent cunning had permitted me to see a great many things in the last few minutes, and I was beginning to understand much that I hadn't understood before.

*If* the planes had found this sleeping hog first, I knew that they would have restored him to normal and taken him back to the fortress, just as they took Flora, and would have pressed him into service as a cook, or an attendant, or a guard, or a laboratory assistant—according to his talent. That was the way their kingdom was growing . . . And they might never know that he had come here with the secret purpose of plotting with the Mashas—not until sometime later when the Mashas' own brand of hell would break loose.

MOREOVER, I was understanding the series of conditions, at last, which appeared to underlie all of these weird bodily changes.

And as I understood, it gave me new hope that *I too might find my way back to normal.*

It was a triple punch—a game of one, two, three.

The first punch was man's ingenuity—the effects of hidden ray-guns which the scientists had planted in the mountains.

The second punch was nature's own, and must have been operating for centuries. Certain waters in this region played their surprise tricks upon the bodies of all comers who, stunned and fainting and thirsty, partook of their seemingly magic qualities.

The third punch—undoing nature's transformation—was something that might be accomplished *by shock.*

*Any* shock? *Zeego* fire?—yes. A flare of yellow powders?—yes. Other explosions or concussions? Perhaps. As I say, I was beginning to feel hopeful, for at last I was seeing a way to work these powders for my own purpose.

If I wanted Dr. Hunt to listen to my pleading, I should first return to human form. Then I could march back to the mountain fortress and make him hear me.

It was a hopeful moment for me, watching the Mashas lead the officer away. Just beyond my fingertips were the tracks of the pig's feet sharp-cut in the mud.

But I couldn't be too optimistic. I had already proved too hard-crusted for the *zeego* guns. As for the powders, I had withstood two explosions, and each time I had been only partially restored.

For the remainder of that day I lolled around in the sun, devising all sorts of shock treatments for myself, in imagination. I imagined throwing myself over the side of the mountain; but the memory of my fall through the crevasse gave me an awful shudder.

Could I leap under the wheels of a speeding truck? Could I start a forest fire and leap into it? Could I creep into the ranks of the guards at the fortress and start devouring them, so that they would shoot me with bullets?

None of these plans appealed to me as being pleasant, and I had visions that any of them might prove uncomfortable.

My nerves were pretty jumpy over all of this speculation. I wanted to restore myself to normal, but I didn't want to kill myself in the attempt. After all, it was better to live as a serpent than to die as a man.

"It is better to live as a serpent," I said to myself several times, "than to die as a man."



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I was fond of that conclusion and was tempted to carve it in stone. At any rate, I had found some consolation. I was a serpent, but at least I had my human memory and most of my normal faculties of reasoning, only lightly adulterated by serpent instincts. I had better leave well-enough alone, and not tempt the fates to cancel what was left of me.

"It's not so bad being a serpent," I told myself, "after you once get your belly toughened up."

And so, after crawling through a maze of mysteries, I was beginning to find myself.

I approached the mounds quietly.

## CHAPTER XVIII

THE Mashas were inside their mounds, warm and comfortable, no doubt. A light rain was sprinkling down over my forty-foot form, and I shivered with the thought that the waters of Space Island might transform me again and take away the arms and legs . . .

But no, I had encountered rains before with no ill effects. I was safe. My theory of transformation might be faulty, but I needn't fear the rain.

The only trouble was that these foothills I was crossing so carefully were structures of earth. I was not only leaving a twisted path in the moistened dust, I was occasionally causing a piece of some Masha's roof to fall in.

Clunk!

I heard a screech of annoyed pygmy voices below me. I had probably knocked half a ton of earth down on their supper. I scurried down into the depression between the mounds and threaded my way swiftly to other places.

I came back to one of the five mounds that provided the entrance to this honeycomb city. Of all the hundred questions that were making quick chills of adventure play along my spine, the most tantalizing was, *Why had these newly arrived full-grown earth people been welcomed here? What strange game was going on within these mounds?*

Low voices were welling up through the open ventilator of the farthest mound as I crept up to the crest of its earthen roof. They were pygmy voices. Two wizened little officials were in conference. They were sitting on the earth floor, their bronzed bodies highlighted by a flickering red fire.

"We lost one of them to the blimp," one was admitting. "They will hold him unless we invade and rescue him. Marsch says there isn't time. We'll attack tomorrow morning."

"Anyway three of Marsch's leaders came through. If they're as clever as Marsch claims, we have a fighting chance to win, this time."

Marsch? Ernest Marsch? Was he mixed up in this world? I was holding my breath for fear I'd gasp too loudly over the tile ventilator shaft.

They were obviously planning to storm the fortress again soon, and these pygmy officials were saying that the newly arrived men were leaders who had come at Marsch's request. There was some grumbling of disappointment because one of the newcomers had been whisked away by the blimp. The same thing, someone said, had happened to the girl that Marsch had brought a few days before. She had been one of his special employees, and the fortress had got her.

"We should have had her, at all costs."

"Well, who's to blame? You saw for yourself that she'd become a two-headed cat. All you had to do was turn the *zeego* fire on her."



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"All right, keep harping on it. We'd have had her if that snaky monster hadn't whirled into the picture."

"So you stopped shooting?"

"He got one of us, as it was."

"You might have turned your guns on him."

"But Marsch didn't want him—not alive, I mean. Let the scientists have him. By this time they probably have him on a pedestal."

They ceased to grumble about lost opportunities a moment later when a messenger brought them the announcement that Marsch would hold a pre-invasion assembly tonight.

"Pre-invasion?" someone said skeptically. "I have the inside information that Marsch is really planning something else. Those new ships he's patched together are all set for a space hop. He's going to take the whole lot of us to some new planet to start a new colony."

BY THIS time I knew there were at least a dozen pygmy officials in the room, though my view allowed me to see only three or four at a time. There was considerable dissention over what Marsch might be planning for them. The official report was that bombing ships were ready, and that the Masha volunteers would fly over the fortress and win it by dropping a few bombs.

But the rumor was spreading that Marsch's real plan was to transport them all to a brighter land.

All of which left me guessing. What was Marsch's commercial angle? He wasn't playing missionary to these downtrodden outcasts. One could be sure that he had his eye on the dollar in the bargain. But so far, I couldn't see the dollar.

In fact, I hadn't even seen Marsch since I had turned serpent. I wasn't sure that he had come through alive.

A few minutes later I was looking down through the triple-tiled ventilators at the other end of the row of five mounds, and there he was—Ernest Marsch in person.

His cigar smoke had led me to him. Through the rain-washed air the aroma had reached me, and I had moved along through the night's darkness until I had come to what was apparently his own Masha headquarters.

He was pacing, smoking, waiting impatiently. Around him were a few earth men—three who had come today, and a few from the ship that I had piloted.

"The girl should be here soon," Marsch said, glancing at his watch. "We need her to put the assembly over. The whole Masha gang will trust us if she'll say the right words."

"They won't trust us very long," someone said. "Not after we take off."

"We don't give a damn about that," Marsch snorted. "Just so we get them aboard the ships. Hell, as soon as we're out in space it makes no difference. Before they ever wake up to what's coming, we'll have them unloaded and *sold as slaves.*"

Nobody seemed surprised to hear these words. The men were all in on a well-organized scheme that was just about to come off. They talked of lining their pockets well, and Marsch assured them that the interplanetary market where these slaves were to be dumped didn't pay off in peanuts.

There was a little sentimental talk about Pete Hogan, who had had the hard luck to fall over the precipice when my ship had dropped us here. "Poor Pete," Marsch said, "he should have got in on this gravy. He was the best yes-man I ever had." But Pete had fallen into the depressed river, just as I had done, and the conclusion was he'd changed into a fish. Now I re-



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

called that several pygmies had been at work, during my first hours of consciousness on this planet, trying to get something out of that deep stream. Marsch had failed to recover his lost mate—but I had got my first pygmy dinner out of the deal!

They spoke of losing a pygmy in their attempted rescue.

"Who was that devilish serpent?" someone asked.

"Probably my pilot, Bob Garrison," Marsch said. "I'll rest easier when I know they've run him through the lab and scoured his bones. He was a trouble-maker. I think he had his own scheme in coming here. He wanted to rescue Dr. Hunt."

"From what I hear, there's no chance of that," one of the newly arrived men said.

"No, not as long as the *White Head* keeps both of the doctors under his thumb," Marsch said.

There was something about the way he intoned the words, *"White Head."* Instantly I thought of the shadowy white skull I had glimpsed in my spree of eavesdropping in the laboratories.

Marsch added, "Have no fear about our plan, as far as the *White Head* is concerned, gentlemen. As I have assured you, *he plays both sides of the fence.* I have his complete approval."

THROUGH the darkness I had been hearing other voices. A party was approaching this earthen city from somewhere down the valley. Within a few minutes the footsteps were thudding softly through the underground passages and presently they came into Marsch's headquarters. It was a party of pygmies—I recognized Padderman and Jallan whom I had once encountered on the fortress roof—and they brought with them Flora Hessel.

"I told you we'd succeed," one of them gloated.

Marsch complimented them and dismissed them. Then he and his guests viewed the prize that stood before them: beautiful, black-haired, dark-eyed Flora. Her face was tilted upward in a characteristically proud pose, and I could read her fearlessness in her firm lips.

Marsch stepped up and put his hands on her shoulders as if he possessed her.

"Well, well, so you've finally come back to the right camp. My little sweetheart is all dressed for a party, isn't she?"

She was wearing a fragile pink and white dress that must have been a gift from someone at the fortress. She responded to Marsch's approach in the manner of a prisoner rather than a sweetheart.

"Relax, relax," Marsch said. "You're among friends."

Having introduced the other members of his party, he proceeded to go over his plans step by step. But his story was somewhat altered for Flora's benefit. He said not a word about pressing the Mashas into slavery. Oh, no, nothing like that. He was going to take them to a new planet and allow them to start a new colony. It all sounded very beautiful.

And all that Flora needed to do was help get them in the mood to accept his magnanimous offer.

"The four space ships are all ready," and he winked with pride over his cleverness. "At dawn—"

I was gathering fever over these cross-currents of deception, and was probably uttering serpent profanity when I was interrupted by a slight tap on my arm. I almost jumped off the mound.

"Move over," came a tiny whisper in my ear. "I want to see, too."

"Kipper!"



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"In person. Pleased to meet you."

"What are you doing here? They'll brand you."

"I had to keep an eye on our lady friend," he whispered. "How'd I know you'd already be here?"

"Listen," I said. "There's a devilish plan afoot. Do you know about it? Get an earful!"

We both listened. Marsch was pouring it on thick, and I didn't know but what Flora was eating it up.

"You'll speak to them at the assembly," he was saying, "so they won't doubt our promises. The main thing you have to do is look honest—and how could you miss? Give them a pep talk on running their own kingdom. Tell them they'll grow into strong men again. *Strong men*—that's the angle. *Let them think they'll have a chance to fall in love with a beautiful woman like you.*"

Flora answered with the edged tone of sarcasm.

"Shall I promise them *female companions,* like you promised me on the trip? How is your supply of terriers, Mr. Marsch?"

"Ha-ha-ha-rrrhuh. Yes, er—just a little joke, gentlemen. Don't mind Miss Hessel, gentlemen," Marsch said hastily. "She's always clowning."

## CHAPTER XIX

I WANTED to hug Flora for what she had just said, and I might have if I hadn't been a serpent.

Under the conditions, all I could hope for was to let her know somehow that she had friends up here on the mud roof. The simplest way to let her know was to put my nose to the ventilator and breathe deep.

*"Ssssss!"*

"What's that?" said one of the men, looking up sharply. I knew he couldn't see anything through the blackness above the ventilator. But Marsch went pale and moved back.

"Was it pygmies?" someone asked. "We'd better not be overheard."

"It's not pygmies," said Flora, in a tone that comforted me. "It's only a breeze from the river."

"We'd better get on with the assembly," Marsch said abruptly.

We went down into the Masha world together. Kipper and I. I think I would have gotten lost if I had gone alone. The tunnels were endless. Most of them were not lighted. But the Mashas knew their way from an almost instinctive sense of direction, and Kipper, like the others, had been here for most of two centuries.

He straddled by neck and clung tight and whispered the directions in my ear. Part of the time we moved along at a gallop. Part of the time I couldn't use my legs because the ceilings were so low, and then we squirmed along the earth in traditional serpent fashion.

"All foot tracks lead to the assembly," Kipper would say whenever a lighted room showed us the tracks of those who had gone before.

"It won't be an assembly if they see me," I said. "It'll be a stampede."

But Kipper assured me that he'd get me into the underground chamber without creating any undue disturbance, and he made his promise good. We crept in by way of a shelf of natural rock about ten feet above the level of the Masha path, and there we huddled, within full view of the torchlights.

Several hundred little pygmies were thronged before us, looking across the cavernous chamber toward a cubical baked-mud platform. They were being swayed by Marsch's eloquence.

Waving his arms and shouting like a politician who is about to save the


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

country with promises, Marsch brought his speech to a ringing conclusion.

"When the sun sets tomorrow night, you Mashas shall again be a proud people. The battle will be over, and you will be in possession of this land that is rightfully yours."

The hundreds of pygmies applauded with shouts.

"No longer will you be outcasts of space—fugitives from the earth and from Mars. You will be masters of your own destinies. And as for the scientists who have invaded this realm, they will be your servants, and with their own serums you shall make them slaves who will do your bidding!"

When the applause quieted, Marsch helped Flora Hessel to the platform. She stood, looking over the multitude of torchlighted faces, and somehow I knew she wasn't going to say what Marsch had wanted her to say.

The Mashas, waiting for her to speak, believed that they were about to attack the fortress.

BUT Flora believed that they were going to be put aboard ships, not for battle, but to seek another planet for a new colony.

Why had Marsch shifted his stories? She must have wondered. Was there still another plan?

"Even Marsch doesn't know," Kipper whispered to me. "*He* thinks his ships are going to take them off to be sold as slaves. But he's going to be fooled."

"How do you know?" I said. "Isn't he all set?"

"He thinks he is, but he's overlooked one important fact. There's a more powerful trickster in the game—the *White Head.*"

Flora was starting to speak. It was a breathless audience.

"I have been brought all the way from the earth to speak to you," she began slowly. "On the earth I have helped many people who are trying to regain a solid grip on life. Mr. Marsch has told me that you consider yourselves outcasts, and he thinks that you deserve some sort of victory to salve your injuries from two centuries ago."

"Yes! Yes!" Half the crowd jumped to their feet, waving their arms and shouting in a fervent affirmative.

She quieted them, "As I was about to say, *I do not agree with Mr. Marsch.* I think you have your own good world here, and I think it is childish for you to nurse your injuries of long ago. I think that Mr. Marsch and your own leaders are doing you a disfavor to stir your old resentments—"

A volley of boos thundered through the room—a chorus that Marsch and his associates joined. They shouted her down, and she stood there, facing them. She had said all she dared. They would have mobbed her if she had said more.

But just at that moment, as Marsch was moving up to the platform shaking his fist at her, someone entered from a door just beyond, and his entrance stunned the mob into silence.

It was the *White Head.*

He was mostly skull, all right—and that was the way I had remembered him from before. A barrel-sized white skull growing out of a keg-shaped body.

From neck to toes he was dressed in a skin-tight green silk costume. Dark green, yet shining. His arms were short blocks of muscle and his feet were like a lion's pads. He gave an impression of fearful power—an unworldly power that was *a strange blend of life and death.*

As he moved closer to the platform, I thought his huge white skull was almost luminous. Its light cast a pallor over Flora's face. Perhaps no one



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

noticed that she climbed down and moved back into a corner. That ghastly white skull held everyone's eye.

The rows of huge white teeth parted, and the deep, hollow translucent eyes seemed to be taking in the face of every person in the crowd.

The White Head paused beside the cubical platform, and when he extended his arm to press against its side it collapsed into a little cloud of dust and was gone.

The surrounding torchlights grew dimmer, and the great skull grew brighter, until there was nothing in the whole room except deep shadows and a glowing white skull.

The skull tilted and turned, and its jaw moved and it spoke.

*"Come."* That deep-cistern voice filled the whole underground world. *"Come. The ships are ready. The time is NOW!"*

## CHAPTER XX

I WOULD have depended upon Kipper in that moment, but Kipper was gone. What was about to happen was more than I could conjecture. But somehow I knew that Kipper was right, there was a more sinister plan on foot than Marsch's scheme of converting Mashas into slaves.

The Mashas were following in double time, running down through the black tunnels to the concealed plaza where the ships were supposed to be ready for the take-off.

The White Head had stood beside that exit, pointing the way, and Marsch himself had led the procession. With him had gone the full-sized officers who were, as I knew, pilots for the ships. But before half of the assemblage of pygmies had joined the rush and disappeared through the tunnel, the White Head raised a hand to hold back the rest of the crowd. There would not be room for all at this time, he had said. And with that he had disappeared down the exit after the last of the procession.

I wanted nothing more than to go to Flora and give her a safe ride back to the fortress. But would the fortress be safe? Whatever the White Head's scheme might be, or Marsch's, it was a cinch there were going to be some angry pygmies as soon as they discovered that this whole movement didn't lead to a direct attack. They were ready for power, and heaven help any man or god or demon of death that might stand in their way.

The torch lights flared up as I was creeping down through the remaining crowd. The pygmies began to scream. It wasn't like a roomful of women screaming, it wasn't like anything but a roomful of Mashas screaming. They scattered out of my path, shooting at me and throwing stones. They would have brought the roof down on themselves and me if they could have done it.

But I reached Flora, and the fright faded from her face at the sight of me.

"Thank goodness!" She was already running, motioning me to follow. "Hurry. If anyone can do anything, you're the one."

"What's happening?" I chased after her, and in a moment we found an opening up into the outdoors. "Where are we going? Do you know?"

She climbed on my back, slapping me first on one side and then the other to direct me as we snake-galloped across the rolling mounds.

"I should have known that Kipper's hunch was right," she sang in my ears as we whizzed through the night breeze. "See, over where that tiny red light is? That's where it's happening. That's where the ships are supposed to fly out."


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

We were making the right kind of progress in the right direction, and a truck would have had to go some to keep pace. I only hoped that the mounds wouldn't cave in under my beating feet. They were frequently breaking through with a heavy thump as my hind feet kicked away from them.

"The ships aren't flying yet," I puffed. "Maybe there'll be time."

"The ships won't fly!" Flora said. "That's what Kipper tried to tell me. He's sure—"

"Why not? What's the game?"

"It's the White Head's game. Not even Marsch knows. Marsch believes—"

"When did you see Kipper?" I demanded.

"When? What's the difference!"

"*Are you sure Kipper IS Kipper?*"

It didn't sound like I was making sense, but suddenly a cold suspicion shot through the length of me and all at once I was slowing up so fast that Flora had to cling to my neck for dear life. I stopped, turned my head, and tried to face her in the dark.

"What is the matter with you?" she cried. "Go on. It's White Head's crimes we want to stop. He's not putting those pygmies on ships. He's pouring them into the transformation waters—concentrated water that will get them, for sure. Kipper said so. He's going to run them through the vat, and right down into the de-composing mill that will eat their flesh right off their bones. As fast as they change into new forms, he'll catch their skeletons. It's a regular skeleton's assembly line, I tell you. *Why don't we go? Are we going to let Kipper fight it alone?*"

My retort must have made her too weak to say anything more, but the wild suspicion had flared up through me, and I had to say it.

"I think it's Kipper that's double-crossing the whole gang of us! *I think Kipper IS the White Head!*"

"Go! Please go!" That's all Flora could say. I thought she was fainting. But I obeyed. With my two serpent eyes fixed on the growing red light I flew into top speed and raced like a ship through space.

## CHAPTER XXI

AN ASSEMBLY line for polished skeletons—that's what it was!

We found our way into a lower level, by following the guides of sight and smell and sound and feeling. Especially sound. I had learned to put an ear to the ground, and catch the directions of the throbbing vibrations that beat faintly through the length of my body. With sounds beating from many directions, I was soon convinced that the procession was finding its way down, and down, through certain subterranean channels that were alive with electrically powered apparatus.

And now Flora and I followed a dark tunnel that promised a flare of amber light around the corner. We heard the gentle hum of machinery. We crawled, on and on, Flora pressing down close over my shoulders to dodge the arched ceiling, and I dragging my arms and legs. At last the tunnel curved into a high-ceilinged chamber whose orange rock walls gave the amber glow to the string of white lights beyond.

Whiter and whiter the way became, and louder and louder the rumble, until, presto, through the open doors we saw it with our own eyes. *A train of freakish skeletons.*

I haven't the heart to describe these strange monstrosities. No two were the same. Very few presented any semblance of balance or symmetry. A hundred highly varied monsters, if sliced



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

into several parts and reassembled with each other by accident, couldn't have matched this weird pageant of bones.

The line was moving slowly—slowly enough that one might count ten before the next skeleton emerged from the black circular opening at our left.

"The pygmies—transformed!" Flora said in an awed tone. "They're walking into it, one after another, thinking they're on the way to the attack!"

We plunged ahead, up the stairs, across a balcony, up another stairs, over a catwalk, down a ramp—we were like a pair of bullets ricocheting between walls. In the back of my mind I was marveling that someone or something had organized enough pygmy slave labor, in secret, to construct such an elaborate set-up. Yet I knew that *if* my friend Kipper *was* the White Head, he had been here for long enough time to accomplish seeming miracles.

Whoever had done it, that powerful person had had the patience to wait, and to keep the secret air-tight, until the magic waters of this region had been converted into something so potent that even the Mashas would fall victim. And rather than let the secret leak out to Masha Land, he had devised a scheme for putting a large share of the population through with one swift stroke.

In my heart I was sick to think that the White Head must be Kipper. I compared the size, mentally, of the two creatures. Without the huge skull, the White Head's body would be the size of Kipper's. The skull might be a mechanical contrivance, in spite of its seemingly perfect operation. Or it might be the real thing—who could tell in this land of quick changes?

As to the time that I had seen the two creatures, I could not recall any instance of having seen both at once.

Then there was Kipper's unusual versatility of manner. He could easily have several voices, with a skull to aid his resonance. And he had seemed a person of such self-confidence, as if he went his own way, carried his own purposes in deep concealment, and feigned an outward manner of light-heartedness.

And yet they certainly would have touched the hot brand to Kipper that night if I hadn't come along. Would he have taken it? Or would he have changed instantly into the White Head and bowled them over with some show of power?

"We'll find the White Head up this way!" Flora said. "One more stair, and through that narrow copper door. *Kipper told me!*"

"Maybe Kipper *showed* you!"

I SAID it angrily, spitefully. Something told me that if Kipper knew his way all through these mysteries, he was a part of this sinister world, no question about it.

"Are you angry with me because I want to help Kipper stop these atrocities?" Flora said. She swung off my back and stood there on the step, glaring at me. My words had stung deep. The light glanced off the copper doorway just above us, and it glinted in her eyes dangerously. We were both panting, and all at once I could hardly speak for anger. But I managed some savage words.

"*How* do you know all about this? How does *Kipper* know—"

"All right, I'll tell you," she said. "*Kipper is the grandson of the White Head.* He told me so. They were shipped from Mars together. The White Head was the only one who was transformed by the waters. Kipper said he was more sensitive, more delicate, and less adapted to the conditions of Mars. He was a scientist, and he


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

discovered that these Space Island waters, saturated with the strange qualities from certain blossoms, could cause all sorts of physical miracles. So he went to work . . . and he became the real power . . . feared and respected like a god. . . ."

"You're sure," I said, "that this is not Kipper you're talking about?" Something was easing in the long, long chain of tensions through my backbone.

"Kipper told me. Yes, I'm sure. And all these years Kipper has kept watch, not knowing what his grandfather was planning, being afraid to tell, and worrying because he didn't dare—"

We pushed through the narrow copper door.

The thick, sickening perfumes of blossoms filled my serpent nostrils and for an instant I staggered backward.

The waters were rushing through a sluice. Dark green waters. Deeper in color than the waters of the depressed river. Thickened waters that reminded me of the greenhouses at the fortress.

One after another, the pygmies were dropping down from an open shaft above the sluice. They fell, kicking and screaming. The sluice was deep, and before they could scramble to the surface they were carried on down, out of sight, to one of the lower levels.

"Can you make the leap?" Flora cried to me.

She pointed to the platform on the other side of the sluice. A fight was going on over there. It was an unfair fight, and it wasn't going to last long. Kipper had a steel bar in his hand. He was trying to slam the White Head over the crown. One telling blow struck. The White Head gave an ugly laugh through his immense white teeth. He had only to fling his hand at Kipper. Kipper would fall back to his knees.

It was only a twenty foot leap, over the water and over the heads of the struggling Mashas. I caught the opposite side of the sluice with my good hands and whipped my tail against the green waters. Then I came up, fast and strong, and ran toward the fighters.

With one hard fling of his hand White Head knocked Kipper off into the water.

I sprang to the edge of the sluice, reached a hand toward the little fellow as he floundered. *My arm wouldn't straighten.* I missed him. I caught a glimpse of his fighting face, his gritting teeth—he went on down, then, with the other Mashas.

The White Head was coming at me.

"The switch!" That was Flora's cry from across the way.

As White Head closed in on me, I felt one muscle after another go paralyzed through the left side of my body. But I had caught Flora's shout, and I saw what she meant. I whipped my long tail at the wall and struck a row of switches —struck them *off!*

The pygmies ceased to fall from overhead. I had evidently closed the hopper. Now there would be a chance for someone up there—Mashas or otherwise—to discover what had been happening.

The waters stopped churning, too, and that seemed to mean that the flow of bodies down into the flesh-stripping mills would stop.

It all happened in a flash, and not for one split second did I have any rest from the White Head's attack. He was putting a freeze on me, but I was walking into him with a good right arm. I flung a blow at his throat.

His mighty skull pinched down on my hand just as I struck. For an instant we hovered on the edge of the sluice as we both fought for footing. But the weight of my paralyzed side threw us over. We fell in together, kicking and striking and biting, and


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

then, as we slipped down through the waters into some lower level I was sure we were locked in a death struggle.

## CHAPTER XXII

"I'M THE serpent. *He's* not the serpent! *I'm* the serpent!" I had started to climb up over the edge of the circular tank, in which the waters were still spinning like a merry-go-round. And as I came up, I saw that Kipper wasn't following me; he was running from me. *He was going toward that—that forty-foot green-and-purple serpent!* I yelled at him. He was taking it to be me, thinking it was a friend. But he was making a mistake. *"No! Come away from him! I'm* the serpent. *I'm* Bob Garrison—over *here!"*

He turned his fighting face toward me for just an instant. Couldn't he understand? How could anyone have understood. I hadn't realized, myself, for a moment, just what transformation had taken place.

But as I intoned the words, *"Bob Garrison!"* and heard the deep rumble of my voice echo through *the huge skull that I now possessed,* I realized.

In the waters we had been transformed. In our fight, the shock treatment had done its work. And now—*I possessed the body of the White Head.*

And there in the tank, lashing its ugly tail through the green waters, was the power of these weird laboratories—the power that *had* been known as the White Head—now in the guise of a legged serpent!

Kipper saw what had happened—just too late.

My words told him, and he was quick enough to know—poor guy—but not quick enough to escape. The big jaws of the serpent closed over his head and snapped the life out of his body in one hard stroke.

I shall never forget Flora's scream. She simply couldn't believe her eyes. On the instant I was shot through with remorse for all the suspicious things I had said about Kipper. Would she ever believe that it wasn't I who took his life in that awful moment?

I have no pangs of remorse over what I did, very soon after the echoes of Flora's scream had died away.

First making sure that no more Mashas would go through the transforming waters, I turned the switches on again and allowed the serpent to go on through. I remembered that a pedestal had already been prepared for him—that is, for me—and I believed he would look well upon it.

Then I turned to the very weighty responsibilities that awaited me.

It was not as difficult as you might think. The greatest advantages were mine, I soon discovered, because I was the White Head, and there was no one, not even a learned doctor, who did not fully respect my slightest whim. If anything, I was going to have to be very careful not to overplay my power and arouse suspicion.

A word to Marsch and his officers from me convinced them that the flights into space which they had planned would have to be postponed until the Mashas had had more chance to work out some plans of their own. I was inclined to agree with Flora that they had a good world of their own right here, where their lives might go in forever, pleasantly and harmlessly; but if some of them wished to venture forth to other planets and start a new colony after due consideration, I would see to it that Marsch and his men would make their promises good.

My attendants at the fortress found comfortable rooms with bars on the doors and windows for Marsch and his officers, pending the Mashas' decisions.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE bars on the door made it possible for persons who felt sociable to stop and say Hello to Earnest Marsch now and then, and to bring him a cigar, if they wished. And some of his visitors learned in time to ask if he wouldn't like a female companion, and couldn't they bring him a little terrier dog for company?

It took me several hours of most earnest talking to convince my one confidante, Flora, that I was not the White Head, but was still, at heart, a very friendly serpent; and that I could even remember the time when I had been Bob Garrison.

"You do seem to be Bob Garrison," she finally said, as we lunched together on one of the fortress porches. "And you certainly aren't acting like the White Head."

I tried to smile through my enormous teeth, and I felt that the light of my great hollow eyes made a slightly terrifying effort to glow warmly.

"Believe me, Flora, I am Bob Garrison, and I remember every moment of our space-ship journey together. Believe me, I fell in love with you on that trip, and one of these times—"

"One of these times, *what?*"

"After I've solved a few of the problems that only White Head's power can solve, I'm going to dissolve myself in the green waters and come back to normal. So don't go 'way."

"Problems to solve? You're the master mind, now, aren't you?"

"I'm taking my time," I said. "You see, there was a rather serious split between Dr. Hunt and Dr. Winston, and now that I've come into this curious power, I can understand it. The White Head forced his will over both men, and he set up a distrust there which was positively vicious. I can't just go to these men and say, 'Dr. Hunt, Dr. Winston is really your loyal friend.'"

"Why not?"

"Because if I did, they would both think that I was again forcing my will upon them, trying to create an untrue friendship. No, it will take time, but they'll work it out. I know they will, because I've withdrawn that wedge that White Head planted. . . ."

We looked down over the edge of the porch to a plaza below, and there we saw the two doctors starting off on a stroll together.

Dr. Hunt was speaking, and we caught a fragment of his conversation. "I think I understand what you have on your mind, Dr. Winston, but it will do us good to talk it over. I've been thinking I'd go back to the earth sometime soon, now that everything seems to be smoothing out. But first I hope that you and I can reorganize our program here . . . I mean, reorganize it from the ground up."

"Or from the river up?" said Dr. Winston with a toss of his head, looking very much like a king.

I turned to Flora and nodded my huge skull. They were back on a solid footing, all right. There would soon be a constructive scientific program rising out of the discarded skeletons of the old.

"It's going to be an interesting world around here as time goes on," I said. "A little less weird, perhaps. And a little less human, with poor Kipper gone."

"Much less human without Kipper," Flora said quietly.

"And it will be pretty terrible after you go back to the earth. Will you be leaving here and going back one of these days?"

Flora smiled. "I've been in love with Bob Garrison for a long time . . . I think I'll stick around and see what happens."

The End



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# CLASSIFIED market place

**RATES AND TERMS:** Ultimate Fiction Group consists of two books . . . Amazing & Fantastic. Space can only be bought on GROUP BASIS at the rate of $.50 per word . . . (including name and address). Minimum order of $5.00 (10 words). Payment must accompany copy except when ads are placed by accredited Advertising agency. Frequency discount: 5% for 6 months, 10% for 12 months paid in advance.

**GENERAL INFORMATION:** First word in all ads set in bold caps at no extra charge. Additional words may be set in bold caps at 5c extra per word. All copy subject to publisher's approval. Closing Date: 1st of the 3rd preceding month (for example, April issue closes January 1st). Send order and remittance to: Leonard Greene, Inc., 180 Madison Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10016.

## AUTHORS WANTED

**LOOKING FOR** a Publisher? Learn how you can have your book published, promoted, distributed. Send for Free booklet "AF". Vantage Press, 120 West 31st Street, New York 1.

## BOOKS

**SF** Bargains. List free. Werewolf Bookshop, Verona 47, Pa.

**SPECIALISTS:** Science-Fiction, Fantasy Weird Fiction, Books, Pocketbooks. Lists issued. Stephen's Book Service, 67 Third Avenue, New York, N.Y.

**SCIENCE FICTION BOOKS.** Free lists. Dennis Kurash, 1121 Windermere, Willowughby, Ohio 44094.

**WANTED**—Ace paperbacks from D series. Please write or send list. Fred Jakobcic, 33115 Armada Ct., Westland, Mich. 48185.

## HYPNOTISM

**HYPNOTISM** Revealed. Free Illustrated Details: Powers, 8721 Sunset, Hollywood, California 90069.

**FREE HYPNOTISM,** self-hypnosis. Sleep learning catalog! Drawer A-F 400, Ruidoso, New Mexico 99345.

**HYPNOTIZE!** Frustrated with self-taught hypnotism courses? Learn rapidly with personal, step-by-step coaching! Careful lesson guidance, newest teaching methods. Educational specialist with university degree. Comprehensive semester course by mail only $40! Free information, no obligation. Accelerated Learning Associates, Department 102, Box 1634, Atlanta, Georgia 30301.

## BOOKS & MAGAZINES

**BACK** issues Science Fiction magazines, books. Pocket editions, 5 for $1.15. Free lists. Jerry Weiss, 90 Second St., Brooklyn 11, N.Y.

**NAME** the book—we'll find it for you! Out of print book specialists. All subjects. (Title alone is sufficient) Write—no obligation. Books-On-File, Dept. AMF, Union City, New Jersey

**"FANTASY COLLECTOR"**, monthly SF bargains, sample 10¢; Evergreen, Colorado 80439

**BACK ISSUES DOC SAVAGE AND SHADOW PULPS FROM 1930's, 1920 AMAZINGS, EARLY SCIENCE FICTION COMICS, EC'S, PLAYBOY, SERIAL ITEMS. FREE LIST. HOWARD BOX 1102, LINDEN HILL STATION, FLUSHING, N.Y. 11354**

**SCI-FANTASY,** horror, weird; books, magazines, comics. Stamp brings list. Midwich Books, 580 Post Avenue, Rochester, New York 14619

**MIT INDEX TO SF MAGS, 1951-1965.** Complete listings by author, title, and magazine, $8.00. Annual supplements, $1.00 each. Write NESFA, PO Box G, MIT Station, Cambridge, Mass. 02139.

## FOR MEN

**CONFIDENTIAL** Directory lists 65 dealers, unusual Adult items—$1.00. Rocco, Box 4015-UK, Miami Beach, Florida 33141.

**3D-CHESS** Rules $2; 3D-Chess Boards Plexiglas $20. Box 4277-A, Hampton, Va. 23364.

## BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

**FREE BOOK** "990 Successful, Little-Known Businesses." Work Home! Plymouth-313J, Brooklyn, New York 11218.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GENUINE
# VOODOO
DOLLS from HAITI

Each doll is handmade in Haiti and is said to contain mystical power for good and evil.

Dolls come in 5 symbolic colors:
**RED**—LOVE
**BLACK**—MONEY
**YELLOW**—HAPPINESS
**GREEN**—SUCCESS
**PINK**—HEALTH

Complete with pins and "HOW TO VOODOO" Brochure.

*Only* $2.00 each
**Set of 5—$8.50**
(any combination)
SORRY, NO C.O.D.'s
*N.Y.C. Residents add 5% Sales Tax.*
Elsewhere in N.Y. State, taxes applicable.

**SATISFACTION GUARANTEED**

**VOODOO**
BOX 655, WESTBURY, N.Y. 11590

**VOODOO** (Dept. A—29)
BOX 655, WESTBURY, N.Y. 11590
PLEASE SEND ME VOODOO DOLLS AS INDICATED:

| QUANT. | COLOR—SYMBOL | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| | RED/LOVE | $2.00 |
| | BLACK/MONEY | 2.00 |
| | YELLOW/HAPPINESS | 2.00 |
| | GREEN/SUCCESS | 2.00 |
| | PINK/HEALTH | 2.00 |
| | SET OF 5 | 8.50 |
| | TOTAL | $ |

I am enclosing check or money order for the total amount.

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY STATE ZIP

## MAGAZINES

**SCIENTIFANTASY** specialist: magazines, books. Free catalog. Gerry de la Ree, 7 Birchwood Dr., Saddle River, N.J. 07458.

**CONTROVERSIAL!** Uninhibited! S-F authors and readers clash in SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW. Two issues $1. Box 3116, Santa Monica, Calif. 90403.

## MISCELLANEOUS

**NEEDLER,"** 47 controversial chapters that needle almost everybody. Postpaid $1. J. Williams, 1027 E. 2nd St., McMinnville, Oregon 97128.

## COLOR SLIDES

**ASTRONOMICAL** art, color slides: catalog, sample, 50¢. Paintings, science-fiction radio play tapes, bookplates. Morris Dollens, 4372 Coolidge Ave., Los Angeles, Calif. 90066.

## BACK ISSUES—SCIENCE FICTION MAGS—

**AMAZING & FANTASTIC** (1964-1968), All issues Great S.F., Most Thrilling S.F. & Science Fiction Classics: 50c each. Ultimate Pub. Co., Box 7, Oakland Gardens, Flushing, Queens, NY 11364

**Don't Miss**

**HUGO AND NEBULA**
**HARLAN ELLISON'S WINNER**
Dog Fight on 101

**JOE L. HEMLEY**
The Edge of The Rose

**ROBERT SILVERBERG NOVEL**

**UP THE LINE**

ALSO

**EDMOND HAMILTON CLASSIC**
Lost Treasure of Mars

**IN THE** SEPTEMBER **AMAZING**

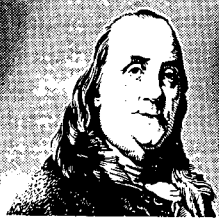
**NOW ON SALE**



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*These great minds were Rosicrucians . . .*

# WHAT SECRET POWER DID THEY POSSESS?



*Benjamin Franklin*

*Isaac Newton*

*Francis Bacon*

## *Why were these men great?*

How does anyone — man or woman — achieve greatness? Is it not by mastery of the powers within ourselves?

Know the mysterious world within you! Attune yourself to the wisdom of the ages! Grasp the inner power of your mind! Learn the secrets of a full and peaceful life!

Benjamin Franklin, statesman and inventor . . . Isaac Newton, discoverer of the Law of Gravitation . . . Francis Bacon, philosopher and scientist . . . like many other learned and great men and women . . . were Rosicrucians. The Rosicrucians (NOT a religious organization) have been in existence for centuries. Today, headquarters of the Rosicrucians send over seven million pieces of mail annually to all parts of the world.

## *The* ROSICRUCIANS

San Jose (AMORC) California 95114, U.S.A.

## THIS BOOK FREE!

Write for your FREE copy of "The Mastery of Life" — TODAY. No obligation. A nonprofit organization. Address: Scribe X.H.Z.

Scribe X.H.Z.
The ROSICRUCIANS
(AMORC)
San Jose, California 95114, U.S.A.

**SEND THIS COUPON**
PLEASE INCLUDE YOUR ZIP CODE

Please send me the *free* book, *The Mastery of Life*, which explains how I may learn to use my faculties and powers of mind.

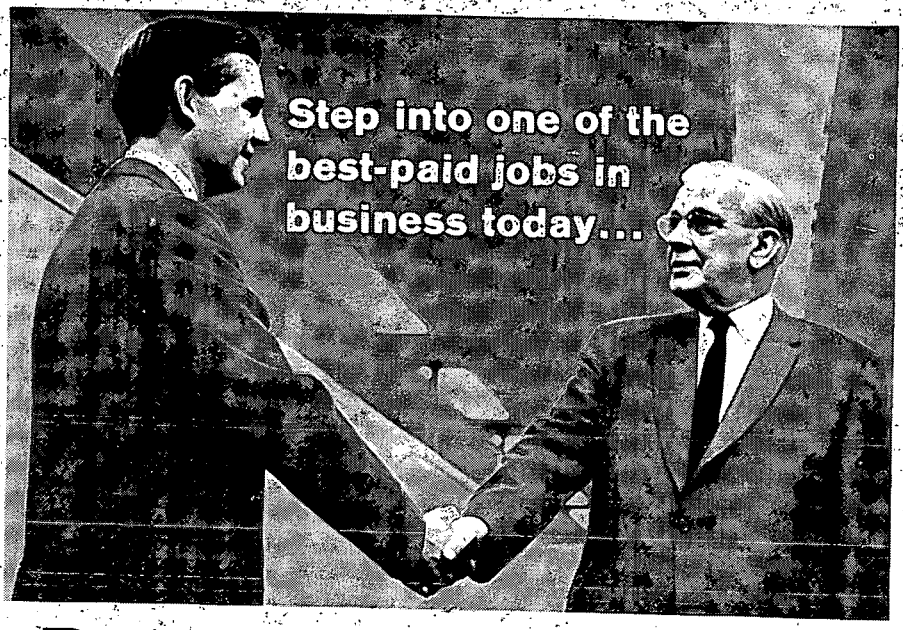
Name_____

Address_____

City_____

State_____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED




# Be an ACCOUNTANT

## Train in your spare time with LaSalle

*LaSalle graduates report up to 56% increased pay the first year*

**THE demand for trained Accountants far exceeds the supply. Salaries keep going higher, promotions come faster. Many men trained in Accounting are being moved up to important management positions. Why remain in a dull job with insufficient pay when you can reap such big rewards in money and prestige?**

You can take LaSalle Accounting training at home, in your spare hours, without any previous bookkeeping experience. LaSalle's distinguished faculty starts you at the beginning; explains every basic Accounting principle and method; gives you actual Accounting problems with your lessons, then corrects and grades your work; shows you exactly how accountants on the job handle these problems. Your training is complete, practical, and enjoyable. You are thoroughly prepared for every Accounting task you will handle in the business world.

Your career could not be in more experienced hands. For more than half a century, LaSalle has been a world *leader in business training*, with over 1,000,000 students. More than 5,500 Certified Public Accountants have trained with LaSalle. A LaSalle diploma in Accounting is a credential respected by America's biggest companies.

**Send for Free Booklet and Sample Lesson**

If you are truly seeking a more rewarding job, with higher pay, a solid position in the business world, and all the good things that come with success, you owe it to yourself to read LaSalle's famous booklet "Opportunities in Accounting". With it you will receive a free sample lesson in Accounting which will demonstrate how LaSalle makes home study easy, interesting and thoroughly practical. Mail the coupon *today*.

**LA SALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY**
*A Correspondence Institution*
**417 South Dearborn, Chicago, Illinois 60605**

**LA SALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY**
*A Correspondence Institution*
**417 S. Dearborn, Dept. 93-006, Chicago, Illinois 60605**

Please send me, free of cost or obligation, your illustrated booklet "Opportunities in Accounting".

Name..... Age.....

Address..... County.....

City & State..... Zip No.....

Occupation..... Working Hours..... A.M. P.M.

101X

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED